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Complaints & Conduct Committee
15 September 2026

Item 4: SPA Quarterly Report (Q1 – 26/27)
Author: Darren Paterson, Head of Workforce Governance
Appendix: Appendix A – SPA Complaints Overview
Appendix B – SPA Complaints Performance Report (Q1 – 2026/27)
Appendix C –Dip Sampling Report Police Scotland Complaints (Q4 – 25/26)

Purpose

- To update the Committee on complaints and conduct matters including key statistics reflecting the position at the end of Q1, 2026/27.
- To update the Committee on findings from dip-sampling of Police Scotland complaints from Q4, 2025/26.

Recommendation
For Discussion

Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment	SO1 - SPA Corporate Strategy
Risk alignment	N/A
Prior governance	N/A
Stakeholder engagement	N/A

Implications

Community	✓	Data & Privacy		Environmental	
Equalities & Human Rights		Financial		Health, Safety & Wellbeing	
Legal		Workforce	✓		

1 Report Detail

1.1 Background

1.2 This is a regular agenda item, containing updates on complaints and conduct matters within the SPA.

1.3 Further detail

1.4 SPA Complaints Performance

1.4.1 Appendix A provides an overview of the complaint handling responsibilities of the SPA with explanatory text on reporting terminology.

1.4.2 The SPA Complaints Quarterly Performance Report, including key statistics reflecting the position at the end of Q1 2026/27, is attached as Appendix B to this report and provides comparison to the previous 7 quarters.

1.5 Workload Management

1.5.1 Detail on ongoing workload is presented as a separate agenda item at the private session of this meeting.

1.6 Dip-Sampling of Police Scotland Complaints

1.6.1 Appendix C provides a report on SPA dip-sampling of complaints closed by Police Scotland during Q4, 2025/26.

1.6.2 A summary of key findings and recommendations is outlined below.

Key findings:

- The PIRC Statutory Guidance provides an expectation that policing bodies should respond to non-criminal complaints requiring investigation within 56 days (40 working days) of receipt. The aim of frontline resolution (FLR) is to provide a quick, informed response within a much shorter timescale.
- Whilst closure timescales for non-criminal complaints requiring investigation exceeded 56 days, these were skewed by one particular case, with all other cases reviewed within the desired timescales. Despite this, the average closure timescale within this dip sample exercise was the shortest seen since introduction of these exercises.
- Findings from this exercise are consistent with earlier samples, demonstrating that, where cases are concluded by FLR at Division or via PSD (NCARU), this is consistently achieved within a very short timeframe. As seen in the last two exercises, FLR can also be

achieved within a short timeframe where it is undertaken via PSD (Non-Criminal Investigations) or Specialist Division.

- It is noted that Police Scotland previously introduced a process of Direct Frontline Resolution for cases where, if the nature of the complaint meets suitability criteria for frontline resolution, but where attempts to reach the complainer by telephone have been unsuccessful, they will instead seek to secure resolution in writing (advising that if the offered resolution is not accepted, complainers may revert back to Police Scotland). Of the files reviewed during this exercise, none were closed via Direct FLR.
- As was identified in each of the earlier samples, there continue to be issues surrounding effective record-keeping practice, with instances of incorrect use of closure categories, insufficiency of recorded updates, and absence of records of complainers being advised that they can reconsider a decision to withdraw their complaint. Furthermore, as also identified in the Q2 2025-26 sample, there was an absence of evidence across all cases of supervisory sign-off of completed Complaint Handling Forms.
- With the exception of the above points, all cases have otherwise been deemed to have been handled appropriately in terms of the CAPSOP (and, in turn, the PIRC Statutory Guidance).

Recommendations

- As previously noted, Police Scotland should ensure that internal monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure accurate and complete record keeping practice in line with accepted standards.
- Police Scotland may additionally wish to consider that, where complaints are being considered for abandonment or withdrawal, there is recorded evidence of communication being made to complainers of their right to recontact PSD again in future should they wish their complaint to be reconsidered.

1.7 Stakeholder Meetings

1.7.1 The National Complaint Handling Development Group (NCHDG) met on 12 May 2026 and 25 August 2026, chaired by Superintendent James Mann. Discussions focussed on Operation Glade progress (including progression of PIRC CHRs and review of complaint determination letter length), outstanding PIRC Audit Recommendations, progress against recommendations from the recent Internal Audit, recent SPA dip sample findings and recommendations, ongoing review of Police Scotland complaint handling procedures, approach to identification of organisational learning, and agreement for follow-up discussions on reporting to

Committee in light of earlier SPA benchmarking activity. The date for the next meeting is still to be confirmed.

1.8 Organisational Learning

1.8.1 The SPA is committed to promoting a culture of organisational learning. Opportunities are identified through a variety of sources including the handling of complaints within the remit of the SPA and PIRC Complaint Handling Reviews (CHRs) if applicable. No specific organisational learning opportunities have been identified during this reporting period.

2 Strategic alignment detail

2.1 Strategic alignment to strategic police plan and other key enabling strategies

Strategic alignment	SO1 - Communities are informed and confident that policing is accountable

2.2 The report delivers on an action within the SPA Corporate Annual Delivery Plan 2026-27 under SO1.

2.3 Alignment to risk register and risk appetite

Risk alignment	n/a

2.4 Prior governance

Prior governance	n/a

2.5 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement	n/a

3 Implications detail

Community	✓	Data & Privacy		Environmental	
Equalities & Human Rights	✓	Financial		Health, Safety & Wellbeing	✓
Legal	✓	Workforce	✓		

3.1 Community – There are no direct community implications with this report. However, effective complaint handling across policing in Scotland is integral to ensuring that trust and confidence is maintained.

3.2 Workforce – There are no direct workforce implications with this report. However, there are implications associated with individual complaint and conduct matters involving individual senior officers or members of SPA staff.

3.3 Equalities & Human Rights – There are no direct equalities or human rights implications with this report. However, there are implications associated with individual complaint matters currently being managed within the team.

3.4 Health, Safety & Wellbeing – There are no direct health, safety or wellbeing implications with this report. However, the wellbeing of those raising, witness or subject to individual complaint and conduct matters is a key consideration in their handling.

3.5 Legal – There are no direct legal implications with this report. However, there are legal implications associated with current ongoing individual conduct matters.

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Appendix A

SPA Complaints Overview

SPA Complaints Overview

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, and the SPA is responsible for handling complaints about: the SPA itself (including Forensic Services); members of SPA Corporate/Forensic Services staff; and senior officers of Police Scotland (i.e. Assistant Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable and Chief Constable).

- As at 14 August 2026, there are 14 officers of senior rank in Police Scotland and 689 staff working across SPA Corporate and Forensic Services functions.

- On receipt of a complaint, the SPA will complete an initial evaluation to determine who the complaint is about and if it is within its remit. For cases within the SPA remit, the initial assessment will ensure they are categorised and dealt with in the most appropriate manner (i.e. relevant complaint; grievance; whistleblowing concern; criminal allegation; misconduct allegation; or a miscellaneous case (which refers to enquiries or other correspondence received by the SPA)).

- A 'relevant complaint' is defined in legislation and is essentially a non-criminal complaint made by a member of the public. The SPA Complaints Performance Report mainly provides statistical information on relevant complaints within the remit of the SPA.

- A single complaint may consist of a number of component parts that can be determined separately. For the purposes of this report, these are referred to as 'allegations' and each complaint may include multiple allegations.

- The handling of relevant complaints are subject to the oversight of the PIRC, who have an expectation that such complaints should be completed within 40 working days.

SPA Complaints Performance Report

Quarterly Report
Q1 2026/27

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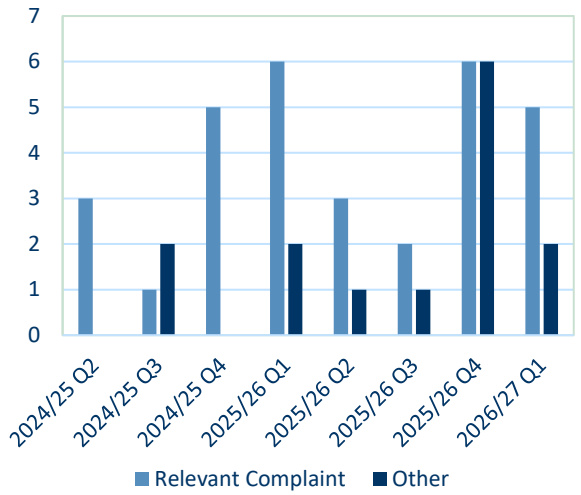
Beyond the first chart (Cases received) all other charts in this report refer to relevant complaints only

Highlights (8 quarter view)

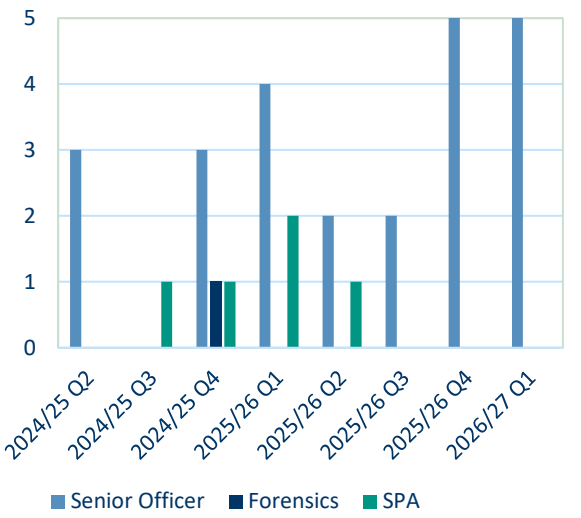
- In context of generally low volume of relevant complaints (and allegations), numbers remain largely consistent
- Majority of relevant complaints, and allegations, relate to senior officers
- 90% of allegations relate to On Duty complaints, the remaining 10% relate to complainers' dissatisfaction with the Quality of Service.
- Of the 30 complaints closed over the reporting period, 9 were out with the target completion time of 40 working days
- At the end of Q1, 4 complaints were ongoing
- Data excludes complaints received that are outside the SPA's mandate

Cases received



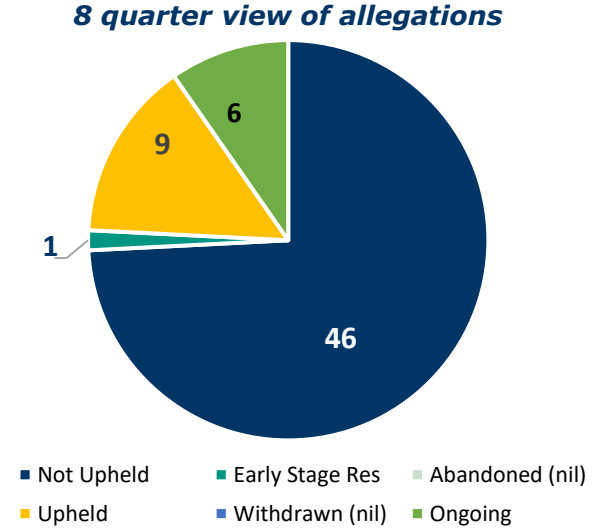
- Across the 8 quarter period, 69% of cases received (within SPA remit) classed as relevant complaints
- 'Other' cases include grievances, whistleblowing, misconduct allegations, criminal allegations etc
- Most cases received outside of SPA remit related to matters that have since been brought to the attention of Police Scotland's Professional Standards Department

Subject of complaints



- The majority of relevant complaints (81%) relate to senior officers, although absolute volumes remain low
- Within these complaints, 49 individual allegations were made, with 81% relating to senior officers.

Determination



- Of the cases closed during the reporting period, 1 allegation was resolved by Early Stage Resolution (ESR) via explanation, assurance or apology.

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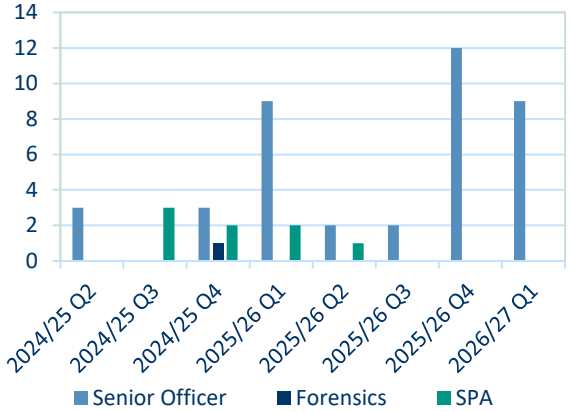
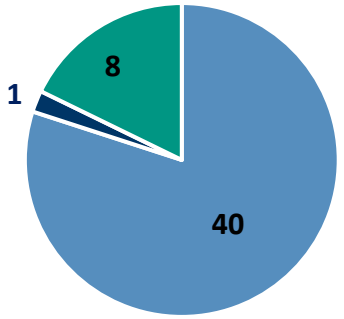
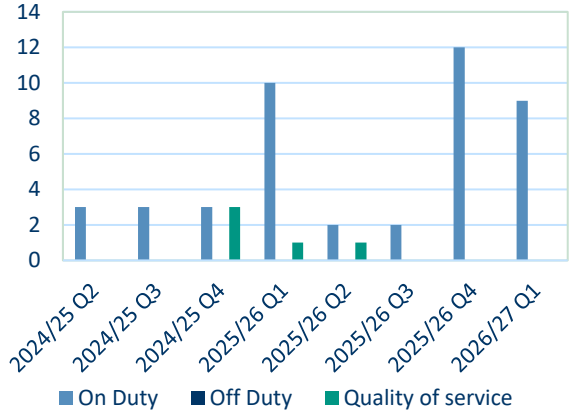
Allegations by subject

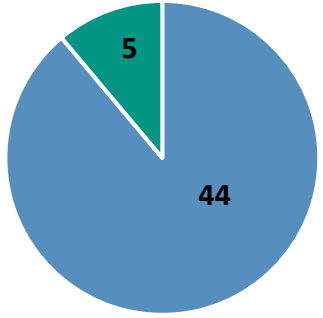
Drill down from 'Subject of complaints' on previous page





Allegations by category





Timescales to close

	24/25			25/26				26/27
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Closed	1	3	7	3	4	0	6	6
Ave. working days to close	*207*	*21*	*70*	*37*	*26*	*0*	*21*	*83*
Cases closed beyond 40 working days								
Closed	1	0	2	1	1	0	2	2
Days to close	*207*		*160, 272*	*101*	*65*		*41, 43*	*212, 230*

While the SPA aims to deal with relevant complaints within 40 working days, each complaint is unique, and a number of factors (such as complexity and seriousness) can impact timescales. The cases closed over 40 working days above can be attributed to:

- Delays in obtaining evidence out with the control of the Authority
- Delays in agreeing Heads of Complaint
- Delays in responses from witnesses

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Appendix C
Dip Sampling of
Police Scotland Complaints

Q4 2025-26

Introduction

The information and evidence collected during the exercise was assessed against the Police Scotland Complaints about the Police Standing Operating Procedure (CAPSOP) and the Police Investigations & Review Commissioner (PIRC) Statutory Guidance on the handling of complaints about the police in Scotland.

Sample Size

This report covers complaints closed by Police Scotland during Q4 2025/26. A random selection of 59 (approx. 5% of 1177 total complaints) were selected for review (comprising West (20), East (19) and North (20) Command Areas).

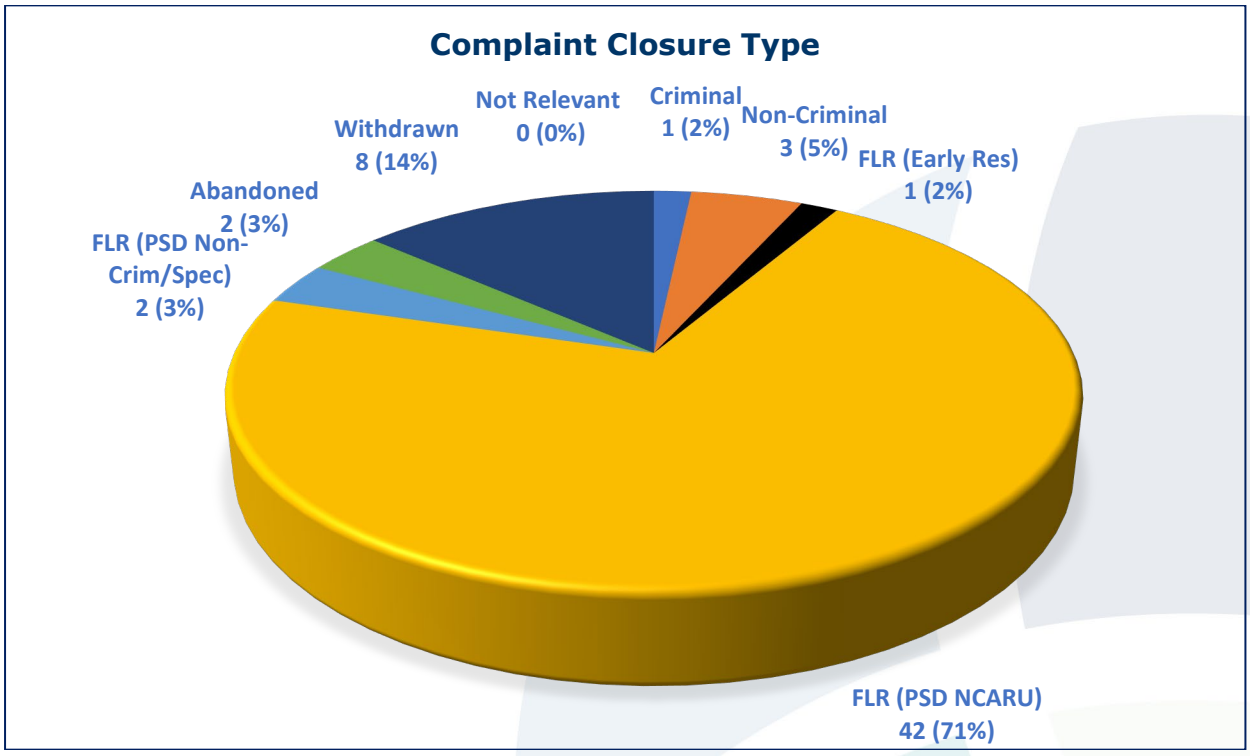
Complaint Closure Type

Of those cases reviewed during this exercise, the following Complaint Closure Types were identified:

Type	Definition
Frontline Resolution	Early Resolution • Complaints resolved by Divisional supervisors PSD (National Complaints Assessment & Resolution Unit) • Complaints received and resolved by the Unit (following assessment of suitability for FLR) PSD (Non-Criminal Investigations) or Specialist Division • Complaints resolved via FLR following allocation for investigation (subject to assessment of suitability for FLR)
Non-Criminal	Complaints where no criminal allegations included, where: • FLR has not been achieved; or • FLR is not considered to be appropriate where the complaint is considered to be serious or complex in nature (i.e. of a nature which may later justify proceedings for misconduct or which allege serious failures in policing services)
Criminal	Complaints where reasonable inference a crime may have been committed
Abandoned	• Complaints closed where complainer cannot be contacted & does not respond to a request to make contact within 14 calendar days • If the complainer subsequently makes contact the original complaint will be re-opened.
Withdrawn	• Complaints withdrawn by the complainer at the initial NCARU assessment stage. Complainer advised to contact PSD should they reconsider.

	• Written statement required from complainer where request to withdraw following allocation for investigation. Criminal complaints may continue to be investigated.
Not a Relevant Complaint	• In terms of the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 [as amended by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012]

The chart below sets out the breakdown of complaints included in the sample. Appendix I details the breakdown of all complaints received in the quarter, and provides comparison to those in earlier dip-sample exercises.



Key Findings

1. Front Line Resolution - Early Resolution

1 (of a total 4 complaint) was reviewed:

- Closure time – 1 working day from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Closure Time (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	1
Q2 2025/26	2
Q4 2024/25	1
Q3 2023/24	1
Q1 2023/24	2

Q4 2022/23	3

2. Front Line Resolution - PSD (National Complaints Assessment & Resolution Unit)

42 (of a total 708 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average closure time – 10 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Closure Time (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	4
Q2 2025/26	15
Q4 2024/25	6
Q3 2023/24	12
Q1 2023/24	12
Q4 2022/23	8

- One complaint took 78 days from receipt to closure, having been initially wrongly categorised as being for Non-Criminal investigation and determination, before being returned to NCARU and correctly concluded via FLR.

3. Front Line Resolution - PSD (Non-Criminal Investigations) or Specialist Division

2 (of a total 33 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average time to allocate for FLR – 1 working day from receipt of complaint
- Average closure time – 93 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Time to Allocate (Working Days)	Average Closure Time (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	1	1
Q2 2025/26	171	200
Q4 2024/25	No data	176
Q3 2023/24	10	54
Q1 2023/24	9	72
Q4 2022/23	25	54

- One of the cases reviewed took 169 days to close. First contact with the complainer (whose complaint was initially assessed as Criminal) was 70 days after allocation, records stating that this was due to 'Op Glade being prioritised by PSD'.

4. Non-Criminal

3 (of a total 69 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average time to allocate for investigation – 10 working day from receipt of complaint
- Average closure time – 63 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Time to Allocate (Working Days)	Average Closure Time (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	1	86
Q2 2025/26	186	517
Q4 2024/25	No data	207
Q3 2023/24	24	99
Q1 2023/24	10	98
Q4 2022/23	8	138
Q3 2022/23	17	88

- One case was closed (not upheld) on the basis of a failure of the complainer to contact PSD with specific details. This should have instead been closed as Abandoned, subject to following expected process in this regard.

5. Criminal

1 (of a total 9 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average closure time – 80 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Closure Time (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	144
Q2 2025/26	690
Q4 2024/25	116
Q3 2023/24	163
Q1 2023/24	160
Q4 2022/23	119
Q3 2022/23	98

- It should be noted that timescales for criminal complaints, following referral to PIRC/COPFS, can be significant and are outwith the control of Police Scotland until they are returned to them for closure

- Whilst the case reviewed was referred to COPFS, and was marked closed, there is no further record of activity in relation to the case to confirm that it was indeed closed and the outcome of the same.

6. Abandoned

2 (of a total 255 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average time to allocate (for FLR/Investigation) – 1 working days from receipt of complaint
- Average time to establish abandonment – 31 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Time to Allocate (for FLR/Investigation) (Working Days)	Average Time to Establish Abandonment after Allocation (Working Days)	Average Time to Establish Abandonment from Receipt of Complaint (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	2	22	24
Q2 2025/26	No data		186
Q4 2024/25			188
Q3 2023/24	9	71	80
Q1 2023/24	15	65	80
Q4 2022/23	31	20	51
Q3 2022/23	19	68	87

- In contrast with earlier exercises, in both cases reviewed, there was a record of reasonable attempts made to contact complainers (including issue of written correspondence) prior to abandonment.

7. Withdrawn

8 (of a total 99 complaints) were reviewed:

- Average time to allocate (for FLR/Investigation) – 6 working days from receipt of complaint
- Average time to withdrawal – 18 working days from receipt of complaint
- This compares to earlier dip-sample exercises as follows:

Sample Period	Average Time to Withdrawal (Working Days)
Q3 2025/26	56
Q2 2025/26	95
Q4 2024/25	264

- Direct comparison is not available for earlier dip-sample exercises, which instead examined receipt to allocation as follows:

Sample Period	Average Time to Allocate (for FLR/Investigation) (Working Days)
Q3 2023/24	19
Q1 2023/24	11
Q4 2022/23	12
Q3 2022/23	11

- There was no evidence in cases reviewed that, where complainers had withdrawn their complaints, they had been advised of their right to contact PSD again in future should they reconsider

8. Not a Relevant Complaint

- No cases were closed as 'Not Relevant Complaint' this quarter
- Findings from earlier dip-sample exercises were as follows:

Sample Period	Cases Correctly Assessed as 'Not Relevant Complaint'
Q3 2025/26	100%
Q2 2025/26	100%
Q4 2024/25	100%

Key Findings

- The PIRC Statutory Guidance provides an expectation that policing bodies should respond to non-criminal complaints requiring investigation within 56 days (40 working days) of receipt. The aim of frontline resolution (FLR) is to provide a quick, informed response within a much shorter timescale.
- Whilst closure timescales for non-criminal complaints requiring investigation exceeded 56 days, these were skewed by one particular case, with all other cases reviewed within the desired timescales. Despite this, the average closure timescale within this dip sample exercise was the shortest seen since introduction of these exercises.
- Findings from this exercise are consistent with earlier samples, demonstrating that, where cases are concluded by FLR at Division or via PSD (NCARU), this is consistently achieved within a very short timeframe. As seen in the last two exercises, FLR can also be achieved within a short timeframe where it is undertaken via PSD (Non-Criminal Investigations) or Specialist Division.
- It is noted that Police Scotland previously introduced a process of Direct Frontline Resolution for cases where, if the nature of the

complaint meets suitability criteria for frontline resolution, but where attempts to reach the complainer by telephone have been unsuccessful, they will instead seek to secure resolution in writing (advising that if the offered resolution is not accepted, complainers may revert back to Police Scotland). Of the files reviewed during this exercise, none were closed via Direct FLR.

- As was identified in each of the earlier samples, there continue to be issues surrounding effective record-keeping practice, with instances of incorrect use of closure categories, insufficiency of recorded updates, and absence of records of complainers being advised that they can reconsider a decision to withdraw their complaint. Furthermore, as also identified in the Q2 2025-26 sample, there was an absence of evidence across all cases of supervisory sign-off of completed Complaint Handling Forms.
- With the exception of the above points, all cases have otherwise been deemed to have been handled appropriately in terms of the CAPSOP (and, in turn, the PIRC Statutory Guidance).

Recommendations

- As previously noted, Police Scotland should ensure that internal monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure accurate and complete record keeping practice in line with accepted standards.
- Police Scotland may additionally wish to consider that, where complaints are being considered for abandonment or withdrawal, there is recorded evidence of communication being made to complainers of their right to recontact PSD again in future should they wish their complaint to be reconsidered.

Appendix I – Total Complaints by Closure Type

Front Line Resolution – Early Resolution

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	4
Q3 2025/26	1
Q2 2025/26	2
Q4 2024/25	4
Q3 2023/24	2
Q1 2023/24	1
Q4 2022/23	5
Q3 2022/23	9

Front Line Resolution - PSD (National Complaints Assessment & Resolution Unit)

Sample Date	Total Complaints

Q4 2025/26	708
Q3 2025/26	754
Q2 2025/26	660
Q4 2024/25	761
Q3 2023/24	717
Q1 2023/24	700
Q4 2022/23	751
Q3 2022/23	761

Front Line Resolution - PSD (Non-Criminal Investigations) or Specialist Division

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	33
Q3 2025/26	25
Q2 2025/26	56
Q4 2024/25	85
Q3 2023/24	109
Q1 2023/24	112
Q4 2022/23	168
Q3 2022/23	251

Non-Criminal

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	69
Q3 2025/26	54
Q2 2025/26	171
Q4 2024/25	154
Q3 2023/24	172
Q1 2023/24	203
Q4 2022/23	208
Q3 2022/23	326

Criminal

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	9
Q3 2025/26	11
Q2 2025/26	24
Q4 2024/25	105
Q3 2023/24	114
Q1 2023/24	108
Q4 2022/23	85
Q3 2022/23	85

Abandoned

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	255
Q3 2025/26	163
Q2 2025/26	230
Q4 2024/25	240
Q3 2023/24	319
Q1 2023/24	329
Q4 2022/23	265
Q3 2022/23	258

Withdrawn

Sample Date	Total Complaints
Q4 2025/26	99
Q3 2025/26	73
Q2 2025/26	93
Q4 2024/25	107
Q3 2023/24	81
Q1 2023/24	85
Q4 2022/23	89
Q3 2022/23	88

Not Relevant Complaint

Sample Date	Total Cases
Q4 2025/26	0
Q3 2025/26	3
Q2 2025/26	2
Q4 2024/25	2
Not Previously Sampled	