

Reportline

Frequently asked questions

What is Reportline?

A: The IOPC Report Line has been set up specifically as a whistle blowing line to enable police officers or members of police staff to report concerns of wrongdoing or malpractice arising within the workplace. These reports may reveal that a criminal offence has been committed or where there is evidence of misconduct that would justify the bringing of disciplinary proceedings.

What is “Whistle Blowing?”

A: When someone blows the whistle, they are raising a concern about danger or illegality that affects others (e.g. members of the public, other employees or staff). The person blowing the whistle does not need to be directly, personally affected by the wrongdoing, a danger or illegality. A whistle-blower is simply trying to alert others and does not necessarily have a personal interest in the outcome of any investigation into their concerns. The whistle-blower must reasonably believe that the information they give or the allegation they make is substantially true, but they are not required to prove the wrongdoing in order for their disclosure to be legally protected. He or she is a messenger raising a concern so that others can address it.

Do Whistle-blowers have legal protection?

A: Almost all workers in the UK are protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) including police officers and police staff. PIDA provides workers in the UK with a safe alternative to silence. It enables workers to raise concerns about wrongdoing responsibly. PIDA protects you if you raise a concern about wrongdoing internally to ensure that if a concern is raised it can be addressed and any wrongdoing corrected.

When an officer ‘blows the whistle’ about another officer they can do so to the IOPC who is a ‘prescribed body’ (under the provision of the Employment Rights Act 1996). The IOPC will make a record of the details provided which may be used by the officer or staff member under PIDA, should the matter go to an employment tribunal. The recording of these details does not necessarily mean the IOPC will investigate the complaint.

What is the difference between a complaint and whistle blowing?

A: Whistle blowing is when you raise a concern about something happening within the force which you feel is wrong. Public interest disclosure protections apply when a person raises concerns about:

- Potential criminality
- Failures to comply with legal obligations
- Miscarriages of justice
- Dangers to the health and safety of any person
- Environmental damage
- Attempts to cover up any of the above

If you are blowing the whistle you don’t need to have a personal interest or be directly affected by the issue. You may simply be a messenger raising a concern.

If you have personally been poorly treated, you may want to make a complaint. This poor treatment could involve a breach of your employment rights or bullying for which you are wanting redress. Police personnel can only make complaints under the PRA in limited circumstances.

The Police have their own grievance and complaints procedure for personnel related complaints such as promotions, pensions, allocation of work, working hours or discipline. These complaints should be submitted to the force directly using their own grievance procedures with guidance from a Federation or Union representative. The IOPC does not have remit or oversight over these issues.

How will information disclosed via the Report Line be used?

A: All contact made to the IOPC Reportline will be recorded, and details added to our register as per our obligation under PIDA, for whistle blowing. If you telephone our Reportline you will be asked to put reports of wrongdoing in writing. Reasonable adjustments can be made in line with Equality Act 2010 where necessary if a complaint cannot be put into writing.

All information passed to us on the whistle blowing line (Reportline) anonymously or in writing will be assessed by the Reportline team and the IOPC intelligence unit where appropriate.

If it is decided that the information should be forwarded to the police force concerned we will only do so with your written consent if you have provided us with your details, unless in exceptional circumstances it is necessary to share information in the public interest. These details will also be logged on our register for the purpose of PIDA.

Are serving police officers allowed to make a “complaint” under the Police Reform Act 2002?

A: Police officers or members of police staff, may only be able to make a complaint under the Police Reform Act 2002 if:

- they were off duty at the time of the alleged incident took place, or
- if the complaint is against a person who at the time the alleged incident took place was under the direction and control of a different Chief Officer,
- they are expressing dissatisfaction with a police force other than the force they are serving with.

When can a police officer/staff member make a complaint under the Police Reform Act 2002?

A. If an officer works for one police force and their complaint relates to the conduct of an officer of a different police force who works under the direction of a different Chief Constable or if the conduct complained of occurred whilst they were off duty, they could make a complaint under the Police Reform Act and would have the same rights as a member of the public under the PRA. If the complaint does not relate to conduct, they can be a complainant if they are expressing dissatisfaction about a different force, not the one they serve with.

Can police officers or members of police staff make a complaint against the police force they work for?

A: Police officers and police staff can make allegations of wrongdoing but will not have the same rights under the PRA as someone who meets the criteria to be a complainant. Where reports made to Report Line contain allegations of criminality or breaches of the Standards of Professional Behaviour, they may result in an investigation. When serious concerns of wrongdoing are raised through Report Line, the Report Line team will consult with the IOPC intelligence unit on the next steps that should be taken.

Complaints about employment or personnel matters must be dealt with directly through the internal procedures of the force the officer or member of staff are employed by. Police officers/members of police staff should consult with line managers, HR department or seek advice from Police Federation or Union Representatives in relation to these matters. The IOPC does not have any jurisdiction over employment or personnel complaints.