

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE – 4 MARCH 2010

COMPLAINANT SURVEYS

REPORT BY THE CHIEF CONSTABLE

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide members with information about how the Force undertakes surveys of those who have made complaints and lessons learned from the results.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In March 2009 Dorset Police undertook a survey of members of the public who made complaints in order to ascertain their level of confidence in the process.
- 1.2 This report describes the survey process and outlines the results from the survey.

2. THE SURVEY PROCESS

- 2.1 The Community Engagement Department (CED) and the Professional Standards Department (PSD) worked together to undertake the survey and review the results.
- 2.2 PSD records details of complaints about the police as required by law under the Police Reform Act 2002. PSD sent out the survey form to those members of the public who had complaints finalised during 2008. A pre-paid return envelope marked for the attention of CED was included to ensure the anonymity of the complainant outside PSD. Subsequently, CED received the responses and produced a summary report of findings.
- 2.3 The survey asked complainants to rate their experience of registering a complaint with Dorset Police. In particular, they were asked how much they felt that they had been taken seriously, treated fairly, listened to, respected, believed and kept informed.
- 2.4 The survey asked complainants to use their own words to describe what they would have expected from Dorset Police in respect of dealing with their complaint. It also asked them to make any other comments about how Dorset Police dealt with their complaint.

3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

- 3.1 Two hundred and forty survey forms were sent out and 59 were returned, representing a 25% return rate.
- 3.2 Over 50% of all respondents agreed that they had been taken seriously, treated fairly, listened to, respected and kept informed. Just under 40% felt that they had been believed.
- 3.3 As the number of respondents was low, the statistical significance of differences in response amongst various age groups could not be tested. However, the responses showed an inclination for those in the 18-35 age group to disagree that they were taken seriously, treated fairly, listened to, respected, believed and kept informed.
- 3.4 Some complainants used the opportunity to make comments in their own words and particular comments were made about expectations of:
 - Impartiality how they would have expected someone other than from Dorset Police to have dealt with their complaint.
 - An apology being made.

4. ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

- 4.1 A number of actions have been taken in response to the findings of the survey which are detailed below.
- 4.2 A review of correspondence to improve clarity and remove phrases which might lead to the public's view that they were not being believed, or that an apology had not been proffered.
- 4.3 In addition, more communication skills training has been provided to officers and staff who are asked to locally resolve complaints. One issue identified was that complainants should be the first point of contact, not officers / staff, which in turn might help complainants to feel more confident with the process.
- 4.4 Consideration is also being given to further research into why people did not think they were being believed. Additionally, consideration is being given to posting two sample fictional reports (one upheld, one not upheld) on the Force website to show the public how thoroughly complaints were investigated and to demonstrate that all complaints were taken seriously by the Force.
- 4.5 Investigating Officers will in future enquire whether complainants are satisfied with the way the case had been handled earlier in the investigation process and not wait until after the outcome of the investigation is known. This will help to identify any dissatisfaction early in the process facilitating prompt corrective action when necessary.

5. FUTURE SURVEYS

- 5.1 Complaints surveys will continue to be undertaken on an annual basis. Discussions will be taking place with the Chief Executive to establish whether the Police Authority could have a future role in undertaking complaints surveys.

5.2 A survey of officers, also undertaken annually, is due to take place in 2010. The outcomes will be reported to members when the results are known.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Members are asked to note this report.

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