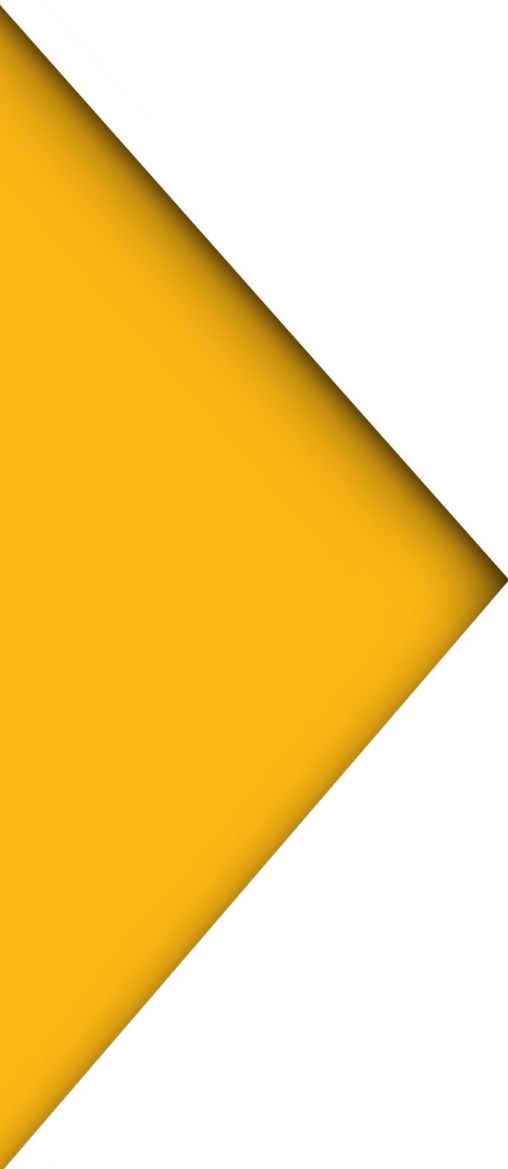


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Policy on the publication of final investigation reports and report summaries

September 2026

A: Introduction

1. This document sets out the IOPC's policy on the publication of investigation report content on our website <http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk> following the conclusion of an IOPC investigation. The investigation decision maker should follow this policy when making publication decisions about final investigation report content.
2. The Director General of the IOPC has a statutory function to secure and maintain public confidence in the handling of police complaints, conduct matters and death or serious injury matters. A key component of this is ensuring that the handling of these matters, including their investigation and outcome, is as open and transparent as possible. One way we aim to do this is by making information about our investigations available to the public.
3. The level of detail and type of information we publish about particular investigations will depend on a wide range of factors. These include the level of public interest there is in publishing certain information, the rights of individuals named in investigation reports and the need to provide clear and accessible information to website users.
4. In order to promote transparency, and therefore public confidence in the IOPC's work, it is important that decisions about publication are made in a logical and consistent way. This policy sets out who is responsible for making publication decisions, criteria to be applied when making publication decisions and the process to be followed for recording and progressing publication decisions. It also outlines how long information should remain published on the IOPC's website for each type of content.
5. Nothing in this policy affects the rights of members of the public to request information under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* or *data protection law*.

B: What is a final report?

6. At the end of an investigation, an investigation report must be completed.¹ This may also be referred to as the 'final report'. The final report is an important document as it is the primary record of the investigation, the evidence and the lead investigator's analysis of the evidence.
7. The final report then guides the decision maker through the evidence to assist in the post-investigation decision making (e.g. whether any person to whose conduct the investigation related has a case to answer in respect of misconduct, gross misconduct or has no case to answer; whether disciplinary proceedings

¹ Paragraph 22, Schedule 3, Police Reform Act 2002.

should follow and what form they should take; whether a referral to the CPS should be made or organisational learning recommendations).

8. It may also be relied upon by the CPS, a coroner, a court and/or those conducting disciplinary proceedings.

C: What is an investigation summary?

9. An investigation summary is a short plain English summary of the entire investigation written by the publications co-ordinator for publication on our website. The summary is likely to include:
 - a. what happened
 - b. what and how we investigated
 - c. the decision maker's opinion with a summary of their rationale, the final determinations that we made, and the outcome of the investigation (such as disciplinary proceedings)
 - d. the outcome of any proceedings or criminal charges
 - e. details of any organisational learning recommendations
10. All names and other personal information should be removed from investigation summaries prior to publication.
11. Information about any organisational learning recommendations made under the Police Reform Act 2002 should normally be included in a published summary unless there is good reason not to (i.e. under the harm test). Learning recommendations can be found on the IOPC's [website](#).

D: What is a publication decision?

12. A publication decision is a decision about:
 - i. The format in which investigation report content is published.
 - ii. The level of detail provided in any published report content.
 - iii. The length of time for which published report content remains publicly available.
13. There are three standard levels of final report publication at the IOPC. These are set out in section H below.

E: Who is responsible for making publication decisions?

14. The investigation decision maker is responsible for making publication decisions. They will tell the lead investigator what the publication decision is, and the lead investigator will liaise with the publications co-ordinator to achieve publication. Section H explains this process in more detail.

F: When should a publication decision be made?

15. A publication decision should be made at the earliest point at which it is possible to rule out future external proceedings. This will normally be either immediately after a report is finalised or, where there are related external proceedings, at the conclusion of these proceedings.
16. A publication decision can be reviewed by the decision maker at any time following the completion of a final investigation report. It may, for example, become necessary to review a publication decision following representations by any party to an investigation or member of the public, or the discovery of other new information. Every time a publication decision is reviewed the updated rationale should be recorded in accordance with section I below.

G: When should publication take place?

17. Subject to the considerations set out in Part L below, reports and investigation summaries should normally be published as soon as possible following the conclusion of all related external proceedings. It is best practice to review the existing publication decision at this time.
18. It is the responsibility of the lead investigator to ensure that the Communications team is aware of the need to publish a report or investigation summary. The lead investigator must contact the publications co-ordinator to notify them that a publication decision has been made, and all proceedings are complete. They should send the publications co-ordinator a copy of the final investigation report and decision maker's opinion document and brief them on what the outcome of the investigation was.

H: Making an initial publication decision

19. In the majority of cases it is only an anonymised version of the investigation summary (see Section C) that is published on the IOPC external website, as opposed to the report itself. However, in certain circumstances it will be in the public interest to depart from this usual position by also publishing the entire report, subject to any necessary redactions. Conversely, in circumstances where

the risk of harm is particularly great it may be necessary to refrain from publishing any report content at all. However, it is likely to be quite rare that not even a summary can be safely published.

20. There are three levels of final report content publication:

- i. Level one — The final report, a summary of our conclusions, and an anonymised investigation summary are published on our website, subject to any necessary redactions. The full report remains publicly available for two years and the summary remains available for five years.
- ii. Level two – An anonymised investigation summary is published on our external website for five years. This should apply to the majority of cases. The lead investigator must consider whether the level of detail included in the summary is sufficient to meet our obligations in facilitating public scrutiny.
- iii. Non-publication – No investigation summary or investigation report is published. This should only apply in exceptional cases.

21. In determining which level of publication should apply to a particular report the decision maker must consider whether either level one or non-publication is appropriate for the particular investigation report. Both of these questions must be considered separately. If the decision maker rejects both level one and non-publication the usual position of level two publication applies.

Publication considerations for the decision maker

22. The decision maker should first consider whether non-publication is appropriate for the report in question. A decision to apply non-publication will only be appropriate if the decision maker is satisfied that there is a real risk that publication of even an anonymised investigation summary would cause, directly or indirectly, an adverse effect which would be disproportionate to the benefits arising from its disclosure (e.g. potential physical risk to individuals or to future law enforcement operations).
23. Non-publication should be treated as a measure of last resort. Before making a non-publication decision the decision maker should consider whether the risks posed by publication can be mitigated through other means such as further editing, redaction or anonymisation.
24. Non-publication is never appropriate for investigations into the conduct of a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) unless contrary legal advice is obtained. This is because we are legally required to publish our reports of these investigations.

25. Best practice will be to obtain legal advice on the viability of other options before making a non-publication decision.
26. If non-publication is rejected, the decision maker must decide whether level one publication (full publication) is appropriate for the report in question.
27. Level one publication will always apply to investigation reports relating to the conduct of PCCs unless contrary legal advice is obtained. This is because we have a legal obligation to publish these reports.
28. The publication of full investigation reports typically carries a greater risk of breaching the privacy rights of individuals than the publication of report summaries. Full investigation reports can also be technical and difficult to read, particularly if redacted. In most cases the facts, findings and outcome of an investigation can be adequately conveyed by the investigation summary.
29. Before making a level one decision the decision maker should consider whether the public interest in publishing the particular investigation report outweighs other considerations, including the privacy rights of individuals.
30. In making this decision the decision maker should consider the following questions:
 - i. Is there a particular need to demonstrate the full detail and context of the investigation rather than just its outcome, in order to maintain and increase public confidence in the police complaints system and/or work of the IOPC?
 - ii. Is there substantial public or media interest in the case, demonstrated for example through high volume of coverage over a sustained period, or through significant direct representations to the IOPC from stakeholder or community groups?
 - iii. Have any significant details of the case been incorrectly reported in the media?
 - iv. Has there been an adverse finding in relation to the conduct of an officer of a senior rank or who was acting in a supervisory role? If the answer is yes this should increase the likelihood of publishing the full report.
 - v. In the case of investigations into potential Article Two breaches, is there a particular need to demonstrate that an independent, effective, open and prompt investigation took place?
 - vi. Is there any other reason why the full investigation report, rather than just an investigation summary, should be published on the IOPC website?

31. Legal advice should always be obtained before making a level one publication decision.

I: Level two publication decisions - and enhanced engagement

32. If a Level two (anonymous summary) publication decision is made, the lead investigator must consider whether the level of detail included in the summary is sufficient to meet our obligations in facilitating public scrutiny. Appropriate public scrutiny is one aspect of compliance with the investigative duty under Article 2, 3 and 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
33. The lead investigator must liaise with the publications co-ordinator to make sure the summary captures enough detail and depth, while remaining anonymous.
34. It is particularly important the summary contains enough detail when there are no further public proceedings (i.e. serious injury, no death and no conduct). In these cases, we need to ensure our 'public scrutiny' element is satisfied most. This applies to all summary publications and is especially important when enhanced engagement applies.
35. In March 2026, we published guidance around [enhanced engagement](#). Cases where enhanced engagement applies are still subject to the same publication decision made by the investigation decision maker, and the need to withstand public scrutiny is particularly poignant here.

J: Recording publication decisions and decision rationales

36. All publication decisions and decision rationales must be recorded in writing, accompanied by the name of the decision maker, dated and saved to the relevant case file.

K: Default periods of time when publishing report material

37. Report summaries are published on the IOPC external website for a default period of five years, after which the content will be removed from public view and retained or disposed of in accordance with the IOPC's records management policies and retention schedule.

38. Full investigation reports published following a level one decision remain on the IOPC external website for a default period of two years. The same publication period applies to any additional documents published alongside a full investigation report.
39. Publication periods set out in this policy relate solely to the availability of content on the IOPC website. They do not determine the retention, disposal, or archival treatment of investigation records, which are governed by the IOPC retention schedule and Public Records Act obligations.

L: Departure from default publication periods

40. A decision to depart from the default publication periods is a publication decision and should be recorded, along with the rationale for the decision, as set out in section J above.

Extension of publication period

41. The IOPC will extend the publication period for investigation report content when it is in the public interest to do so. For example, it may be appropriate to extend the publication period of a report which continues to attract significant media and public interest beyond the default two year publication period.
42. When extending the publication period of a full report the decision maker should take into account any competing privacy interests of individuals named in the report. A publication period should never be extended beyond that which is necessary to achieve the intended purpose of publication.
43. Where publication periods are extended or departed from, this should be notified to Records Management to ensure alignment with retention, appraisal and disposal decisions.

Early removal and review of published report content

44. In certain circumstances it will be necessary to remove, edit or update published report content (for example in the event of an upheld criminal or disciplinary appeal by an officer named in an investigation report). If a decision maker becomes aware of anything which calls into question whether the published report content is up to date, correct and accurate they must review their original decision in light of this new information. If the original decision maker is unavailable, another decision maker of equal seniority will be able to review the publication decision. A new publication decision should be made and recorded in the manner outlined in section J above.
45. Parties to an investigation and members of the public are also able to challenge publication decisions. If this occurs, the decision maker must review their original

decision in light of any representations made or other new information. If necessary, a new publication decision should be made and recorded in the manner outlined in section J above.

46. Before removing published report content from our website entirely, the decision maker should consider whether alternatives such as further redaction could sufficiently mitigate any newly identified risks. A decision to alter published report content is a publication decision and should be recorded in the manner outlined in section J above.

M: Redaction of personal data from published investigation reports and report summaries

Full reports

47. The redaction of the name of any police officer or member of police staff from a full investigation report prior to publication should be carried out in accordance with the [naming-of-police-officers-and-police-staff-IOPC.pdf](#).² Particular care will be required in relation to the naming of firearms officers, especially in the context of the presumption of anonymity for authorised firearms officers charged with qualifying offences (see s.200 of the Crime and Policing Act 2026). The Naming Policy provides further guidance on this issue.
48. If personal data about any other person is to be disclosed in a published report, their consent should be sought. This is especially the case if they had no control about what information was provided to the IOPC about them.
49. Where consent is withheld, the data should be removed or redacted from the report prior to publication. The same principles apply where a witness refers to another person who has not provided a statement for the investigation.
50. It is recommended that advice from the Freedom of Information team is sought before a decision to redact information from a report prior to publication is made. This will help ensure that information that is disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is not removed from external publications.
51. A decision to redact information from a published report is a publication decision and should be recorded, along with the rationale for the decision, as set out in section J above.

Report summaries

² IOPC policy on the naming of police officers and police staff subject to IOPC investigation, appeal assessment or criminal proceedings.

52. As published investigation summaries will normally remain publicly available for an extended period of five years, the names of individuals and local place names should normally be removed in order to protect their privacy.
53. A decision to depart from this approach is a publication decision and should be recorded in the manner outlined in section J above. Legal advice must be obtained before making a decision to name an individual in a published investigation summary.
54. If personal data about any person is to be disclosed in a published report summary, their consent should be sought.
55. Where consent is withheld, the data should be removed or redacted from the report. The same principles apply where a witness refers to another person who has not provided a statement for the investigation.
56. A decision to redact information from a published investigation summary is a publication decision and should be recorded, along with the rationale for the decision, as set out in section J above.

N: Other related published content

57. Investigation reports are often published alongside supporting content such as media releases. All supportive content should be unpublished in line with the publication decision for the investigation report. For example, if a level one publication decision is made the concluding media release should remain on the website for two years. Two years is also the default publication period for concluding media releases, unless a decision is made to retain the information on the website as outlined in section K.
58. Learning recommendations are often linked to an investigation report and should ideally be published at the same time as the report. However, because learning recommendations are not time limited they should remain on our website indefinitely. In this context, "not time limited" means there is no prescribed expiry, review or removal date for learning recommendations, as they may continue to provide value and support organisational learning long after they are published.

IOPC

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