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IPCC: Police watchdog 'woefully under-equipped'

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The police watchdog for England and Wales is overwhelmed, woefully under-equipped and failing to get to the truth of allegations, MPs have said.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission needs more resources and powers, [the Home Affairs Select Committee report said](#).

IPCC chairwoman Dame Anne Owers welcomed the report, saying the body was struggling to meet expectations.

One in four officers faced complaints between 2011 and 2012.

About 30,000 officers had faced complaints, which were mostly trivial and dealt with at a local level, committee chairman Keith Vaz, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

"What we would like to see is the IPCC concentrate on the really serious issues. When they have dealt with serious corruption cases, 45% of the corruption cases they have investigated have ended up with the Crown Prosecution Service," he said.

The report comes as the IPCC prepares for its biggest investigation, into the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989.

'Not yet capable'

In a scathing report, MPs said the IPCC was overloaded with appeals. Serious police corruption cases were being under-investigated while resources went on less serious complaints.

* OR NOT INVESTIGATED AT ALL !

"Police officers are warranted with powers that can strip people of their liberty, their money and even their lives and it is vital that the public have confidence that those powers are not abused," said the MPs.

"We conclude that the Independent Police Complaints Commission is not yet capable of delivering the kind of powerful, objective scrutiny that is needed to inspire that confidence."

MPs said the IPCC had too many former officers among its investigators and delegated too many complaints to the forces to investigate themselves, only to overturn the conclusions in a third of appeals.

The body also lacked specialists capable of analysing crime scenes in the critical hours after an incident involving the police, they said.

"Compared with the might of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, the IPCC is woefully under-equipped and hamstrung in achieving its original objectives," said the MPs, adding that it was smaller than Scotland Yard's own internal investigations team.

'Plebgate'

The MPs say the government should provide ring-fenced funding for investigations affecting police integrity.

They also said the IPCC should be investigating the Downing Street "plebgate" affair involving police and then-Cabinet minister

Andrew Mitchell.

Dame Anne said the fact the Metropolitan Police had assigned 30 of its officers to that investigation - the equivalent of a third of her whole investigative capacity - illustrated "the choices we have to make every day".

The report said the IPCC needed to be able to interview officers under caution.

And private firms - like G4S, Capita, Mitie and Serco - involved in delivering services that would once have fallen solely to the police should fall under the IPCC's watch.

The IPCC is preparing to investigate allegations that police officers were involved in a cover-up of failings following the 96 deaths at the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy.

Parliament has passed legislation to give the body more powers for the massive inquiry and ministers are guaranteeing funding for extra investigators currently being recruited.

Dame Anne told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I think there's quite a lot of validation in the report, but what the committee says, and what we have been saying ourselves, we can't do enough independent investigations, we can't exercise sufficiently rigorous oversight about the way that police deal with complaints.

"We cannot do the job the public expect us to be able to do and if we are to do that job then we need to be properly resourced to do it and given the proper powers to do it."

Chief Constable Michael Cunningham, of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said the police service was keen to work with the IPCC to improve its response to police complaints, in particular to achieve speedier outcomes.

But he said developing the role of the IPCC must also not mean the police service outsourced its own responsibility to manage complaints.

* SO THAT THEY CAN CARRY ON BURYING AS MANY AS POSSIBLE

"Serious allegations of misconduct must be rigorously investigated, in many other less serious cases the police service itself is the body best placed to identify and put right mistakes, learn necessary lessons and rebuild public trust," he said.

* RUBBISH

A Home Office spokesman said: "Improving police professionalism and integrity are at the cornerstone of the sweeping reforms we are making to the police force, and the IPCC has a key role to play.

"We are already working to ensure the organisation has the powers and resources it needs to manage the challenges it is currently facing and we will shortly announce a package of new measures designed to further improve the public's trust in the police."

More than 200 police a year quit to avoid complaints: Misconduct allegations are not being properly investigated

- Damning assessment of Independent Police Complaints Commission
- Nearly one in every four officers subject to complaints last year - 31,771
- Just 21 out of 8,000 corruption allegations investigated by IPCC
- Watchdog 'woefully under-equipped' to get to the truth, report says

By [Jack Doyle](#) and [Emma Reynolds](#)

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The police complaints commission today admitted that only 21 out of 8,000 corruption allegations against officers had been investigated, as a damning assessment of the watchdog's shortcomings was published.

Chairwoman Dame Anne Owers said she did not have the resources to do more, after a report by MPs attacked the organisation as 'woefully under-equipped and hamstrung'.

More than 200 officers a year are escaping disciplinary charges by retiring or resigning, the report warned.

Staggeringly, last year nearly one in every four officers was subject of a complaint, amounting to a total of 31,771 in England and Wales.

But in a scathing report, the Home Affairs Select Committee warns of a public suspicion that 'police are getting away with misconduct and criminality' because the Independent Police Complaints Commission

cannot get to the truth. → * SHOULD READ - 'WILL NOT'

'We need more resources and we need more powers,' Dame Owers said today. 'We cannot do the job the public expect us to be able to do.'

But solicitor Raju Bhatt argued that the IPCC was failing to make 'effective use of the powers and the resources that they already have', on Radio 4 this morning.

He said that what was needed a 'change in culture'.

Of 8547 corruption allegations, 837 were referred to the IPCC, 21 investigated, 18 prosecuted and just 13 found guilty. * HOW DAMNING THESE FIGURES ARE!

Serious cases of police corruption are 'under-investigated' the report says, as the IPCC concentrates on less serious accusations.

Committee chairman Keith Vaz said the IPCC was insulting victims by just 'scratching the surface' of serious alleged abuses.

MPs took evidence from victims of police misconduct, their lawyers, police representatives and ministers. Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, told the committee she had 'no confidence in [the commission] whatsoever'.

The committee recommended that IPCC investigators should take 'immediate control' of an investigation of serious injury or death involving police officers.

Serious corruption cases - including evidence tampering - should automatically land with the IPCC instead of a force's internal complaints department.

They also concluded that the IPCC needed a legal power to require a force to implement its recommendations after something goes wrong.

During the investigation of the death of newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson, it emerged that the police officer who attacked him, PC Simon Harwood, had ducked ten complaints by switching forces, including a road-rage attack, racial abuse and a series of heavy-handed arrests.

He 'retired' from the Met on medical grounds on the eve of a disciplinary hearing, only to rejoin within days on its civilian staff. After transferring to a separate force, Surrey, he then returned to the Met in 2005 as a police officer.

IPCC chairman Dame Anne Owers backed the call for more resources and powers.

She said: 'This report recognises that we do not yet have the resources or powers to do all that the public rightly expects and needs from us. That is what we have been saying for a long time.

'Without that, we will continue to struggle to meet the legitimate expectations of complainants and of families who have lost someone in tragic circumstances.'

He warned of a 'complaints roundabout' where cases are first investigated internally by the accused force, but are then appealed to the IPCC because the complainant is unhappy.

The report revealed that one in three such cases is overturned by the IPCC because of failures in the initial investigation. As a result, the IPCC was 'overloaded' with appeal cases, MPs said.

Committee chairman Keith Vaz said: 'When public trust in the police is tested by complaints of negligence, misconduct and corruption, a strong watchdog is vital to get to the truth - but the IPCC leaves the public frustrated and faithless.'

He added: 'Nearly a quarter of officers were subject to a complaint last year. Many were trivial, but some were extremely serious, involving deaths in custody or corruption - it is an insult to all concerned to do no more than scratch the surface of these alleged abuses.

'The IPCC investigated just a handful and often arrived at the scene late, when the trail had gone cold. The Commission is on the brink of letting grave misconduct go uninvestigated.'

The IPCC is currently investigating the Hillsborough disaster in what investigators say is the biggest ever inquiry into police misconduct, during which it will be given new powers and additional funding.

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