

# Frequently asked questions: Outcomes from the Hillsborough investigations

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**Updated July 2025**

This document provides additional information about the outcomes of our investigations to date (and those of Operation Resolve), into complaints and conduct matters relating to the Hillsborough disaster.

It has been updated to include details of the latest decisions sent out this month. Complaints are set out by theme, with further information on how we reached our opinions. If you have any questions that are not addressed here, please email [!Outcome Enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk](mailto:Outcome.Enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk)

## Background to the IOPC and Operation Resolve investigations

One month after the HIP Report was published in 2012, the IPCC (now IOPC) launched an independent investigation into police actions in the aftermath of the disaster.

A second investigation, Operation Resolve - ordered by the then Home Secretary - examined the actions of all organisations involved in the disaster. To ensure independent oversight and scrutiny, the elements of the Operation Resolve investigation relating to the police were managed by us.

More information on our Hillsborough investigations can be found on our website at [policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/investigations/hillsborough](https://policeconduct.gov.uk/our-work/investigations/hillsborough)

## What were the complaints and conduct matters that we investigated?

We received complaints from 98 people, of whom 31 made more than one complaint about the police.

Forces also referred a number of 'conduct matters' to us. A conduct matter is where there is an indication that an officer may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a way that would justify bringing disciplinary proceedings.

In total, 352 complaints and conduct matters were investigated, involving 138 named officers. There were also more than 40 complaints and conduct matters which referred to unidentified officers, some involving more than one.

In a small number of cases, we reinvestigated complaints that had been made at the time of the disaster, after we successfully requested a change to the law.

## **What were the results of our investigations?**

To date, 110 (31%) complaints and conduct matters have been upheld or in our opinion, there would have been a case to answer for misconduct for one or more officers, had they remained serving.

There are two complaints and two conduct matters still under review. We expect these to be finalised over the next two months.

The latest decisions mean 52% of complainants have had at least one complaint upheld, or in our opinion, there would have been a case to answer for misconduct for one or more officers, had they remained serving.

## **What were the complaints about?**

The complaints fell into four themes:

1. South Yorkshire Police's planning and policing of the match.
2. West Midlands Police's (WMP) investigation into the actions of South Yorkshire Police.
3. What officers from South Yorkshire Police said about the disaster afterwards, including their engagement with subsequent inquiries, inquests and investigations, and to the media.
4. How South Yorkshire Police (SYP) officers behaved towards families and survivors.

### **1) Complaints about South Yorkshire Police's planning and policing of the match**

We investigated a range of complaints and conduct matters in respect of senior officers in charge of policing the match.

To date, in the majority of these, we upheld the complaint or give an opinion that there would have been a case to answer for misconduct for one or more officers, had they remained serving.

A number of complaints were about officers being verbally abusive or using excessive force at the match. We have been able to uphold most matters regarding incivility or abuse and some of those regarding excessive use of force.

In some cases, it was not possible to identify the officers involved, and many of the incidents were not captured on the available footage.

## **2) Complaints about West Midlands Police's investigation into the actions of South Yorkshire Police**

A significant proportion of complaints we received centred on the way West Midlands Police gathered evidence from supporters and family members immediately after the disaster, for use in subsequent inquiries, investigations and inquests.

Some complaints were about matters such as the questions officers asked witnesses, the fact that officers did not record witnesses' answers accurately or fully, and that interviewing officers placed undue emphasis on whether supporters attending the match had consumed alcohol.

We upheld those complaints where the evidence supported that officers had failed to record significant information directly relevant to their enquiries.

We upheld most of the complaints relating to the interviewing of witnesses who were under 18 where there was no adult present. Some complaints about the way they were interviewed where there was an adult present were also upheld.

We also found evidence of significant failures and omissions in West Midlands Police's criminal investigation, including key lines of enquiry not being followed and potentially significant witnesses not being interviewed.

## **3) Complaints about what South Yorkshire Police officers said about the disaster afterwards, including their engagement with subsequent inquiries, inquests and investigations, and to the media**

We carried out 12 investigations concerning the evidence put forward on behalf of South Yorkshire Police or by individual officers of the force to West Midlands Police and to the other inquiries and inquests, or as part of media statements. Our investigations found evidence to support allegations that in the aftermath of the disaster, South Yorkshire Police sought to deflect the blame from themselves.

In the latest outcomes, former South Yorkshire Police Chief Constable Peter Wright (CC Wright) in our opinion would have faced a case to answer for gross misconduct

for discreditable conduct, for seeking to minimise SYP's culpability for the disaster and deflecting the blame towards Liverpool supporters, had he still been serving. For further information, see 'Outcomes for senior officers' below.

We also investigated complaints about how the police provided information to the media, particularly where comments included criticisms of the behaviour of supporters. Many were anonymous, but in the latest decisions, we have found a case to answer for misconduct for some complaints.

#### **4) How South Yorkshire Police officers behaved towards families and survivors**

We received a range of complaints about how officers from South Yorkshire Police behaved towards families and survivors after the disaster.

These mainly related to the hours after the disaster, when families were seeking information about missing loved ones. Complaints were also made about the way in which families had to identify those who had died, and the manner in which South Yorkshire Police officers questioned them when taking identification statements.

While we didn't find sufficient evidence to meet the legal requirements which would have allowed us to uphold all of these complaints, there is no doubt that the overall treatment of families and friends in those hours lacked compassion and empathy.

#### **Outcomes relating to senior officers**

We investigated 110 conduct matters about 15 senior officers at SYP and WMP—who were either integral to the policing of the match or involved in the aftermath of the disaster—for 41 (37%) there would have been a case to answer for misconduct, had the officers still been serving.

For CC Wright, who had overall responsibility for his force's approach, we found a case to answer for discreditable conduct for 10 conduct matters. Many relate to him commenting publicly to the media in the aftermath of the disaster on matters that were still under investigation. It is our opinion that he set the tone for a defensive strategy to minimise police culpability and deflect the blame towards Liverpool supporters. This began on the evening of the disaster and continued to the force's submissions to the Taylor Inquiry and the run up to the Popper Inquests.

Our investigations also found that CC Wright should have promptly suspended Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield (Ch Supt Duckenfield), the match commander on the day of the disaster, who we found had a case to answer for 10 breaches of the Police Discipline Code 1985.

These centred on a series of failures in decision making and communication in managing the build-up to the game and not acting when it was clear supporters were in distress. He would also, in our opinion, have faced a case to answer for gross misconduct for falsely saying to the FA, club officials and others that Liverpool supporters had forced one of the gates open (Gate C).

Superintendent Bernard Murray (Supt Murray) who was with Ch Supt Duckenfield in the Police Control Box, would also have had a case to answer for five breaches of the Police Discipline Code 1985. These included failing to respond to the seriousness of the situation as it unfolded and being slow to coordinate a rescue operation.

We were also of the opinion that Assistant Chief Constable Walter Jackson (ACC Jackson), would have had a case to answer for neglect of duty on two counts. As the most senior officer on the ground that day, he failed to take control of the situation when evidence shows that the match commander was struggling. We also found that both ACC Jackson and Supt Murray would have had cases to answer for gross misconduct, if they had still been serving, for failing to plan adequately for the match.

## **Why has it taken so long to conclude the investigations into the complaints and conduct matters?**

Before we were able to fully investigate complaints and conduct matters against former officers, there were legal processes - some external to the IOPC and Operation Resolve, including the inquests and the trials - that needed to take place first.

Our statutory obligations under the Police Reform Act 2002 require us to conduct our investigations into complaints in a specific way – to inform the relevant police force or police and crime commissioner of our opinions and give them an opportunity to make their determinations before making our final decisions.

These investigations are unprecedented in terms of scale and complexity, but nevertheless, they have taken far longer than anticipated.

## **Were any referrals made to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)?**

As a result of our investigations, both the IOPC and Operation Resolve referred a number of individuals to the CPS for it to decide whether anyone should face criminal charges in relation to the disaster. In June 2017, six individuals were

charged with criminal offences, of whom five went on trial and one (who wasn't a police officer) was convicted.

As we completed our investigations, we considered whether any further referrals should be made to the CPS and decided none should be made. This was due to a range of reasons, including that the identity of an officer was unknown, the officer concerned had since died, the time limit to bring a charge had expired, the matter had previously been referred to the CPS or there was no new evidence available.

### **If a complaint is upheld, will anyone face disciplinary processes?**

No. All officers subject to our Hillsborough investigations had left the police service when we started our investigations following the completion of all other legal proceedings.

Although former officers may now be subject to disciplinary proceedings in certain circumstances, these rules came into effect in December 2017 and therefore do not apply to the Hillsborough investigations. This means that none of the officers investigated can be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

### **What does it mean if a complaint is not upheld?**

Where we have not upheld a complaint or given an opinion that officers would have had a case to answer for misconduct, had they still been serving, the outcomes do not seek to challenge the accounts of those who complained.

We have upheld complaints or given an opinion on whether an officer would have had a case to answer for misconduct where the available evidence meets the legal thresholds we must apply. Complaints had to be assessed against the police professional standards in place at the time of the disaster. These were very different to the standards that apply today.

To be able to uphold a complaint, the decision maker must conclude that the force or officer did not deliver the service to a standard that was expected of them. This decision is made on the balance of probabilities, based on the evidence gathered during the investigation.

To give an opinion that an officer would have had a case to answer, the decision maker must decide if there is sufficient evidence that a misconduct panel could conclude that there has been a breach of the standards amounting to misconduct or gross misconduct.

Matters may not have been upheld for various reasons, including insufficient, contradictory or missing supporting evidence or that the complaint was made about a decision taken elsewhere rather than the actions of the officer carrying out the instruction. One example is West Midlands Police officers were instructed to gather information from witnesses using standard questionnaires, which had been designed by others.

## **What if I want to challenge a decision?**

As our decisions and opinions about complaints are final, they can only be challenged through a judicial review process.

You may wish to seek independent legal advice if you intend to pursue this course of action. Please note, you have three months to issue a judicial review claim form in the Administrative Court, and this should be preceded by a pre-action letter of claim directly to the IOPC. More information can be found by searching 'how to challenge our decisions' on our website at [policeconduct.gov.uk](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk)

Once an investigation is complete, we are not able to carry out any further enquiries, unless we decide that it needs to be reinvestigated. We only reinvestigate in limited circumstances, in accordance with our 'Reinvestigation of IOPC investigations policy', which can be found on our website. We do not have the power to reinvestigate managed investigations, such as those conducted by Operation Resolve.

## **Victims' Right to Review**

Where a matter has been subject to a criminal investigation and the decision maker has decided not to make a referral to the CPS, a complainant or person who has 'Interested Person' status has the right to have this decision reviewed. This is known as the Victims' Right to Review (VRR).

In respect of the latest investigations and outcomes, there is no VRR.

## **What is 'Interested Person' status?**

Under Section 21 of the Police Reform Act 2002, an Interested Person is:

- a relative of a person who has died or suffered serious injury (and is incapable of making a complaint) as a result of the alleged conduct
- a person who has suffered serious injury

- a person the Director General delegate has considered has an interest in the handling of the complaint or conduct matter which is sufficient to make it appropriate for information to be provided to them in accordance with this section.

## **What support is available to you?**

We do not underestimate the impact the Hillsborough disaster and the years that have followed, including this process, have had on you. If you feel you need support, there is a range of services available to you. including the option of support via the Police Federation or National Association of Retired Police Officers (NARPO). Alternatively, please contact your GP or visit the NHS website at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)