



COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

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1. SUMMARY

This document sets out the policy and procedures to be followed by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue (SFRS) employees when dealing with a complaint. It explains how our complaints procedure works and how to correctly deal with an external complaint.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

SFRS is committed to providing excellent service to our communities. However, we accept that we do not always get it right and the public have a right to raise any concerns they may have about the standard of service that we provide.

Anyone has the right to raise a concern and share their experiences of the Service, employees, or assets.

We aim to:

- **Follow a consistent procedure** – we want to ensure that all Complainants have a fair, consistent, and structured process for addressing their concerns they have with our Service



- **For the complaint process to be positive** – this will enable organisational learning and service improvement
- **To be accessible** – we want to make our complaints process to be easy to follow and our contact with Complainants will be clear and avoid jargon.

We are committed to treating everyone fairly. We will listen to complaints, treat them seriously and learn from them.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all complaints received by SFRS from members of the public, stakeholders or any other individuals that interact with the Service. This policy is not intended to cover internal complaints or grievances made by employees, this will be addressed under the [Grievance Procedure](#). However, an employee can make a complaint about the service we have provided in our professional capacity as a member of the public.

4. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy is to ensure that feedback is properly administered, recorded, and acknowledged and where necessary, investigated.

The Service is committed to an open and honest culture that enables people to tell us about their experiences and not to feel disadvantaged when doing so.

5. COMMITMENT TO FEEDBACK

- Encourage feedback, good or bad that can help improve our Service
- Provide clear guidance on how to give feedback
- Provide support, where necessary to people wishing to give feedback about our Service
- Promote open dialogue with the Complainant throughout the duration of the complaint and investigation process
- Conduct a thorough investigation based on facts giving an honest, balanced, and understandable response
- Evidence learning and follow up any actions, where appropriate
- Provide performance outcomes on how we deal with complaints.

6. CORE CODE OF ETHICS

The Fire Service [Core Code of Ethics](#) is of paramount importance, as it serves as a guiding compass for the actions and behaviour of every member within our Service. This ethical code is not merely a set of guidelines; it is the fundamental belief system that drives our Service and lies at the heart of every decision made and action taken.

The code ensures that all Fire Service staff uphold the highest standards of integrity, professionalism, and commitment to public safety, both on and off duty. It fosters a culture of trust, accountability, and respect within the organisation and towards the communities we serve. By adhering to this code, our Service prioritises the well-being of others, and demonstrates selflessness and dedication in our mission to protect lives, property, and the environment.



The Fire Service Core Code of Ethics serves as a constant reminder of our commitment to the communities we serve and reinforces the inherent values that make the Fire Service an invaluable pillar of any community.

7. DEFINITIONS

- **Complainant:** The individual or individuals making the complaint.
- **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction about our services, staff conduct, or any other aspect of our operations.
- **Comment:** Contacting us with ideas or opinions on ways that the Service could improve. Share local knowledge that the Service may be able to use. Request Service information or sign posting to another Service or partner.
- **Compliment:** Contacting us to let us know we are doing something well. This helps us to identify areas of best practice to continually improve our Service.

8. COMPLIMENTS

SFRS gratefully accept compliments from members of the public across a variety of forums as listed on our contact page via our Website. Positive feedback allows the service to uphold high standards and allows for an optimistic culture to be adopted. Compliments received are shared with personnel via SFRS internal comms channels and with relevant departments/staff members where specified.

9. EXCEPTIONS

There are some exceptions that are not included in this policy.

9.1 Whistleblowing Complaints

Members of staff who wish to report an issue/problem/concern are encouraged to follow the internal procedures, [Whistleblowing Policy](#) found on Staffnet or seek advice from their Union Representative.

9.2 Employee Complaints

Complaints made by staff members against staff members will be sent to Human Resources for investigation. Staff are encouraged to raise their complaint through the [Grievance Procedure](#) which can be found on Staffnet or seek advice from their Union Representative.

9.3 Complaints about the Executive Leadership Team

Complaints about the Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Assistance Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) or Director of Finance, Assets & Resources will be dealt with by the Staffordshire Commissioners Office.

Email: Review@staffordshire-PFCC.gov.uk

Online by visiting: <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk>



9.4 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Independent Reporting Line

HMICFRS is an independent body responsible for inspecting Fire and Rescue Services on their efficiency, effectiveness and how well they look after their people. HMICFRS provides a confidential Independent reporting line tool to Fire and Rescue Service staff in which they can inform the inspectorate of relevant information prior to or as a part of a service's inspection.

It should be noted that the reporting line is not a whistleblowing service and employee complaints should follow the process outlined within the [Grievance Procedure](#).

9.5 Complaints made by Professionals about other Professionals

This will be dealt with by the regulating body.

9.6 Anonymous Complaints

Complainants who do not wish to share their details with us regarding a complaint may be investigated dependent on the nature and severity. However, we will not communicate any investigation outcomes.

9.7 Complaints more than twelve months old

Complaints over twelve months old will not be investigated unless the Complainant can demonstrate that they have known about the actions for less than twelve months or when the matter brings the Service into disrepute.

9.8 Data

Complaints about how the Service has handled personal data will be dealt with by the Data Protection Officer. If there has been a personal data breach reported externally through the complaints process, then the Data Protection Officer must be notified immediately. This is because under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) an organisation has 72 hours (about 3 days) to investigate and inform the Information Commissioner (ICO) should it be determined that a breach has occurred. If a data breach relating to a member of staff is escalated internally and a grievance is raised, then Human Resources must be informed to investigate under the grievance procedure. The Data Protection Officer must be notified to ensure the investigation is facilitated within the required 72 hours (about 3 days).

9.9 Conduct

Concerns raised relating to the behaviour or actions of staff members should be raised through the normal designated complaints process. However, after the initial fact find they will be passed to the Head of Human Resources to investigate.

10. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

If you require additional support to make your complaint, this will be provided wherever possible. Should you require support with language or visual impairment, please contact us via telephone or by email so that this can be arranged.



11. ADVOCACY

Should the Complainant require an advocate for their complaint, we will arrange to meet to explain the complaints process and record the details of the complaint. If the complaint is made by the representative, we must make sure that we follow confidentiality and data protection legislation. In addition to authorising the representative to act on their behalf. The Complainant must consent to us discussing their complaint and sharing their personal information with us.

12. EQUALITY STATEMENT

We are committed to ensuring equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our operations. As per the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as outlined in the Equality Act 2010, we recognise our legal obligations to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations between individuals with protected characteristics.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are fundamental values that guide our approach to complaints handling. By aligning our Complaints Policy with the Public Sector Equality Duty, we aim to provide a fair, accessible, and non-discriminatory platform for individuals to voice their concerns. We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity, eliminating discrimination and fostering good relations between individuals.

13. UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

If we consider a complaint to be unreasonable, it will be referred to an appropriate Area Manager who will consider whether further investigation is required.

Unreasonable complaints will include, but not limited to:

- We have reason to believe that it is of vexatious nature.
- Makes large numbers of repeated complaints about the same issue in a short time frame.
- The Complainant continues to pursue unreasonable outcomes from an investigation. These complaints will be logged but they will not receive an acknowledgment or a response
- Refusal to accept a decision has been made and upheld.
- Resubmitting a complaint that has already been dealt with in the last 6 months.
- Using abusive, threatening, or libellous language.
- If we consider their complaint to be unreasonable, we will inform them in writing and advised of any action to be taken or right of appeal.



14. COMPLAINT PROCEDURE OVERVIEW

14.1 Making a complaint

- Complaints can be submitted via email, letter or through our websites dedicated complaint submission form. We will also accept verbal and in person complaints if necessary.
- Complainants should provide as much specific information as possible, including date, time, location (if applicable), people involved (if known) and any other relevant details about the complaint.
- Anonymous complaints will be accepted, but contact information could facilitate a more effective investigation and resolution process.

14.2 Initial acknowledgment and response

- Upon receiving the complaint, an acknowledgment will be sent to the complainant within 48 hours. If the complaint is made through the dedicated complaint response form, the return email will automatically acknowledge the complaint.
- The acknowledgment will outline the expected timeframe for resolving the complaint and what the Complainant can expect.

14.3 Investigation and resolution

- General Service complaints will be investigated by an impartial Officer/Manager who will aim to investigate and resolve the complaint within 28 days from the acknowledgment.
- If further investigation is needed, additional time may be required, but the Complainant will be kept informed of the progress at each stage of the complaint.
- Following the investigation, a written response will be provided to the Complainant explaining findings and, if applicable, any actions taken or proposed to resolve the complaint.

14.4 Escalation

- If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the initial response, they can request to escalate the complaint.
- The escalation request should be made in writing, clearly outlining the reasons that the complainant is not satisfied with the response.

14.5 Recording and Monitoring

All complaints, including their details, progress and resolutions will be recorded on the Confidential Complaints system. This will be used for Service improvement by identifying trends, training needs and for systemic issues that require attention.



14.6 Review

After exhausting all stages of the compliant process an independent review can be requested on how the complaint has been managed. This can be done by contacting the Staffordshire Commissioners Office.

Email: Review@staffordshire-PFCC.gov.uk

Online by visiting: <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk>

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

All complaints and personal information provided during the complaint process will be handled in accordance with relevant data protection laws and confidentiality policies. Personal information will only be used for the purpose of investigating and responding to the complaint.

16. TRAINING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We are committed to learning from complaints. All SFRS staff will receive training on handling complaints effectively and sensitively. Feedback that is gathered from the complaints process will be used to improve our service, policies and procedures.

17. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and compliance to regulatory requirements. Any necessary updates or amendments will be made accordingly.

18. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the complaints process, to make a complaint, comment or compliment can be found on our website.

19. KEY CONTACTS

<https://www.staffordshirefire.gov.uk/contact-us/>

Tele: 0300 330 1000 (freephone)

Email: complaints@staffordshirefire.gov.uk

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