



# ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

## **Feedback, Compliments & Complaints Policy**

Policy Owner: Information Governance Team, Corporate Services

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### **About**

This policy applies to all employees, contractors and volunteers of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority). This includes temporary staff, agency workers, volunteers, contractors, partners and visitors.

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## **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy is to set out the approach by which the service seeks to deal with any feedback made to it, the investigation process, and the service anyone giving feedback can expect to receive.

The Authority's policy is to ensure that feedback is dealt with fairly and appropriately. This includes sharing insightful commentary and learning widely. It is our intention to be courteous and acknowledge feedback and provide written outcome responses whenever appropriate.

Feedback gives an indication of how well the service is performing in the public domain and where improvements can be made to training, procedures, and policy. Some compliments received about the service are shared within the service via our Corporate Communications team.

## **3. KEY INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Complaints**

An expression of dissatisfaction which requires a formal investigation and a written response. These can be received in writing, by post, email, through social media, verbally or in person. A local resolution should be considered in the first instance.

### **3.2 Concerns**

Those expressions of dissatisfaction which do not fall under the definition of a complaint, and which can legitimately be resolved at an appropriate level without formal investigation. Solutions to informal complaints should be straightforward, simple, and quickly meet the needs of those raising their concerns.

### **3.3 Comments**

A comment is a query or statement about a particular activity or set of circumstances that does not raise a complaint. This could be a question about how or why the Authority is doing or not doing something, or it could be a suggestion of how it could do something differently. Any such comment will be noted (logged), shared with relevant parties and a response provided where appropriate. The service will triage comments and identify any that need to be processed as Freedom of Information requests, environmental information requests or Subject Access Requests and will be processed and logged accordingly.

### **3.3 Compliments**

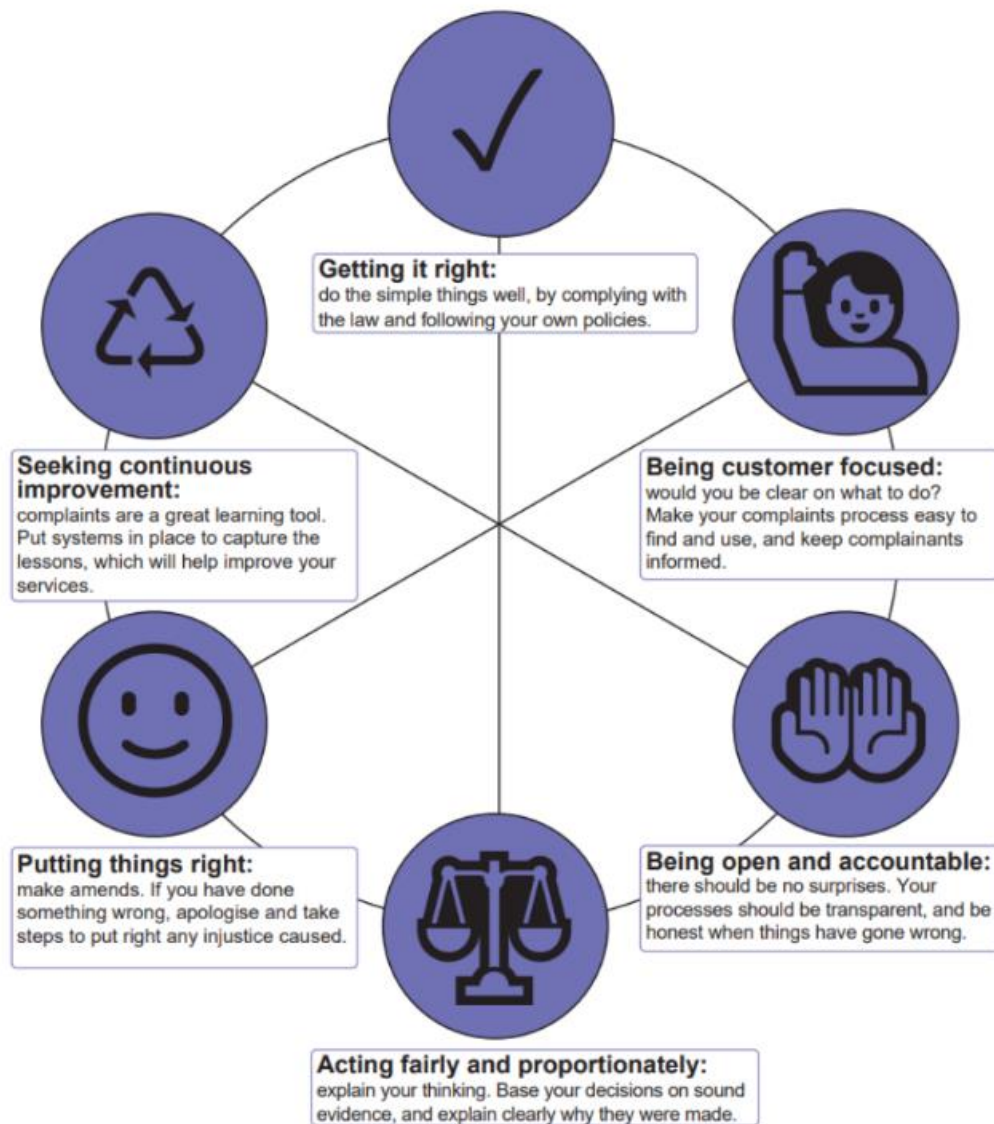
Compliments are an expression of praise or satisfaction received by the Authority for work or actions undertaken by individuals in the employ of the Authority or provided by the service for the Authority.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above, please contact our Complaint Officer at [Compliments.Complain@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:Compliments.Complain@essex-fire.gov.uk)

#### 4. KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Complaints Officer – This is the person from the **Information Governance Team** that will facilitate the complaints process.
- Investigating Officer – This is the person that the Head of Department / HR assigns the complaint to. The Investigating Officer will be commissioned by the Head of Department / HR to conduct the investigation. This will be done in line with a set of approved Terms of Reference.
- Head of Department / HR – This is the person who is responsible for commissioning of the investigation and who, once complete, will review and approve the proposed response. They will also assess whether there are any follow-up actions or escalation required.
- The Director of Corporate Services or another relevant Director will review the final response, approved by the Head of Department or HR, and grant the final approval to send it to the complainant.

## Principles of Effective Complaint Handling



## 5. KEY PROCEDURES

**Step 1** – Complaint received, and receipt acknowledged by the Complaint Officer within 48 hours.

**Step 2** – Complaint assessed by the Complaint Officer within 48 hours, and the appropriate pathway determined. This could include:

- Referral to HR
- Referral to Professional Standards (once established)
- Direct to the relevant Head of Department advising further investigation needs to be commissioned.

**Step 3** – Within 5 working days the complainant is updated by the Complaint Officer notifying them of: -

- The timeframes in which their complaint will be dealt with
- What actions have or will be taken as a result, i.e. further investigation, or safety measures already put in place to mitigate a health and safety matter.
- Who their direct point of contact is should they wish to make any further enquiries or provide further information etc.

**Step 4** – Dependent on the nature of complaint, the Investigating Officer will hold a multi-disciplinary group meeting with pre-agreed representatives to discuss the complaint and the proposed action plan.

**Step 5** – The Complaint Officer will continue to engage with and update the complainant on a regular basis regardless of whether there has been any further progress. This is to assure the complainant that the service is taking their complaint seriously and is conducting a thorough process.

**Step 6** – The Complaint Officer will ensure that the complaint investigation is tracked and completed within the 28-day timeframe. If there is likely to be a delay, then the complainant should be contacted to update them and to agree a suitable revised timeframe for the complaint to be concluded and responded to.

**Step 7** – Any delays or issues of a serious nature should be reported via the Information Governance Manager to the Director of Corporate Services and / or other relevant director.

**Step 8** – Once the complaint has been fully investigated, the proposed response (agreed by the relevant Head of Department / HR) will be submitted to the Director of Corporate Services or another relevant Director to confirm their satisfaction that appropriate actions have been taken by the service and that the response can be submitted to the complainant.

**Step 9** – Once the complainant is in receipt of the outcome of their complaint, this should be followed up with contact from the Complaint Officer to understand their level of satisfaction in how the complaint was handled, inviting any further feedback.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Date of receipt – Complaints, concerns, comments, and compliments are deemed to have been received when first contact is made by the complainant with any member of the service.</li><li>• Acknowledgement – A new complaint, compliment or feedback needs to be acknowledged in writing or over the phone by the Complaints Officer.</li><li>• Appointing an Investigating Officer – The relevant Head of Department / HR will appoint an Investigating Officer to complete the investigation of the complaint, comments or concerns and produce the response.</li><li>• The Complaints Officer will send the response from the Complaints Mailbox or by post once full approval has been provided as per step 8.</li><li>• Retention of data – The data relating to this policy held will be securely stored according to our retention schedule. <a href="#">Retention schedule .pdf</a></li><li>• All complaints are to be dealt with through the Complaints Officer.</li></ul> |
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## **6. UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR**

The service recognises that making a complaint can be a stressful time and will make some allowances in this situation. However, we do not accept that staff should be subjected to abusive, offensive, or aggressive behaviour in any situation. We reserve the right to assess the behaviour in question and to take the actions set out in section 8 below.

## **7. CLASSIFICATION OF COMPLAINTS**

Any complaints made to the Authority are covered by this policy, including complaints relating to actions taken at operational incidents, actions relating to cases of adult or child safeguarding, or actions taken in relation to the Data Protection Act 2018. In the case of allegations about safeguarding and data protection, the way of handling these is different. They will be handled by officers who have received additional, specialised training.

This policy would not normally apply to challenges or objections concerning the enforcement of safety regulations, such as the issuing of an enforcement notice, activity occurring from an audit of a business premises, or subsequent failure to comply with legislation. In these circumstances, the complainant will be directed to the appeals process outlined in the relevant legislation. However, feedback about the conduct or behaviour of staff undertaking these actions does fall within the scope of this policy.

Where a complaint relates to a member of staff, following investigation of the complaint it may also be necessary to consider the nature of the feedback under the Authority's Grievance and Disciplinary Policy and / or Code of Conduct.

### **7.1 Complaints relating to the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive and Service Leadership Team**

Complaints against the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive or a member of the Service Leadership Team can be submitted by any member of the public and staff. If the complaint is related to an internal grievance matter, then this will be dealt with through the Grievance Policy.

Complaints against the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive which are received by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service should be forwarded on to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority within two working days.

Complaints are accepted in any of the forms set out earlier in this policy and via the PFCC's website, as follows:

Telephone: 01245 291600

Email: [pfcc@essex.police.uk](mailto:pfcc@essex.police.uk)

Website: <https://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk/contact-us/>

Post: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, Kelvedon Park, London Road, Rivenhall, Witham, Essex CM8 3HB.

Complaints against a member of the Service Leadership Team which are received by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service should be managed through the service's internal process and referred to the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive within 2 working days.

Complaints against the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive, Principal Officers and members of the Service Leadership Team may cover three areas:

- Professional conduct

Any accusation in this area will be considered against the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles) and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's Values and Code of Conduct.

- Direction and control of the service

Any accusation in this area will be considered against what can reasonably be considered the Chief Officer's responsibility for the direction and control of the service. This may include delivery against the responsibilities delegated to them by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner as set out in the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority Constitution.

- Criminal accusations

These will be dealt with by the police.

## **7.2. Complaints relating to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

If you wish to make an allegation or complaint that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or the Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner has failed to comply with the PFCC's Code of Conduct, that allegation must be put in writing to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, Essex County Council, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1QH. The Panel will consider the complaint and, where appropriate, form a subgroup to consider the complaint and agree a resolution.

## **7.3 Complaints relating to the Monitoring Officer**

Where a member of the public wishes to make an allegation or complaint against the Monitoring Officer of the Authority, this should be sent to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner who will consider the complaint. Complaints are accepted in any of the forms set out earlier in this policy, and via the PFCC's website as follows:

Telephone: 01245 291600

Email: [pfcc@essex.police.uk](mailto:pfcc@essex.police.uk)

Website: <https://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk/contact-us/>

Post: Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, Kelvedon Park, London Road, Rivenhall, Witham, Essex CM8 3HB

## **7.4 Right to Appeal**

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of our investigation into your complaint, you have the right to appeal. Within 20 days of receipt of your complaint outcome, please set out the grounds of your appeal and submit them in one of the following ways:

Email: [informationgovernance@essex-fire.gov.uk](mailto:informationgovernance@essex-fire.gov.uk)



Post: Information Governance Team, Kelvedon Park, Rivenhall, Witham CM8 3HB

Alternatively, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman at:

Website [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Local Government Ombudsman  
PO Box 4471  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

Email: [enquiries@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk)

The Ombudsman will only act if the complaint falls within the scope of their jurisdiction, as defined by the relevant legislation, such as the Local Government Act 1974 which sets clear boundaries around the types of issues they can investigate.

## **8. UNREASONABLE OR PERSISTENT CONTACT OR BEHAVIOUR**

The Authority is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially. As part of this service, we do not normally limit the contact complainants have with the service. However, there are a small number of complainants, who, because of the frequency of their contact or persistent nature of the contact with the Authority, we refer to as 'unreasonably persistent complainants'. ECFRS identifies an unreasonably persistent complainant by recognising behaviours such as excessive repetition of issues already addressed, refusal to accept reasonable responses, or inappropriate demands for attention or resources. These behaviours can impede ECFRS's ability to focus on legitimate concerns.

To manage such cases, ECFRS will review internal policies and communicate boundaries respectfully, and document interactions thoroughly. If necessary, restrictions on contact may be imposed, such as limiting communication to a single point of contact or setting response timelines, while ensuring fairness and adherence to legal and ethical standards.

The Authority has a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of their staff. We do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, abusive, offensive or threatening. We may take action to protect staff from that behaviour by:

- Restricting the access the unreasonable complainant has with the service. The decision to restrict access to our service will be taken at Assistant Chief Fire Officer / Director level.
- Requiring contact in a particular form (for example, letters only).
- Requiring contact to take place with a named officer.
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times and / or asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that the Authority considers it to threaten the immediate safety and welfare of our staff, further options will be considered, for example reporting the matter to the police or exploring legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant warning of that action.

## 9. MONITORING AND ASSURANCE

The policy will be reviewed a minimum of every 24 months unless there is a requirement to do so sooner.

## 10. RELATED LEGISLATION

- Data Protection Act 2018 (including the General Data Protection Regulation 2016)
- Care Act 2014
- Children's Act 1989
- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Fire & Rescue National Framework for England and Addendum
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

## 11. RELATED SERVICE POLICIES OR RELATED PROCEDURES

- Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure.
- Grievance and Disciplinary Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Statutory Requests for Information Policy
- Speak up Speak out [Speak up Speak out](#)

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