



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

Speak Up, Speak Out

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Introduction

The Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is interested in hearing about your experiences with our services. Comments, compliments, and complaints (collectively referred to as feedback) are all opportunities for the Authority to learn and improve its services.

In this guide, you will find guidance for anyone considering providing feedback about our services. We urge all users of this document to consider an informal route to resolution. It is possible that you will not be satisfied with the outcome of the informal procedure. In such a case, exercising your right to complain is the appropriate next step.

We value your feedback. For us to learn what works well for you, we would appreciate feedback when you are satisfied with our services. When expectations have not been met or when our services have fallen short of published standards, your feedback is crucial to our improvement.



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If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, we will require their signed consent.

1. Frequent Questions & Answers:

When considering comments, compliments, and complaints about our service we try to be:

- Helpful and accessible
- Clear, timely and thorough
- Positive, improving and learning lessons for the future.

1.1 How can you submit a comment, compliment, or complaint?

- Use our online form <http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/contact/>
- Telephone: 01376 576299
- Email: compliments.complain@essex-fire.gov.uk
- Post: Information Services, Kelvedon Park, Rivenhall, Witham, CM8 3HB

1.2 What is a compliment?

A compliment is an expression of praise or satisfaction with the service provided by the Authority or its employees in the course of their duties.

1.3 What happens when I compliment you?

- Your compliment will be acknowledged.
- We will review and investigate what you have told us in order to understand what has been successful.
- Lessons will be learned from the compliment and best practices will be shared across the Authority.
- We will praise and give credit to our staff whom the compliment relates to.

1.4 What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of discontent or dissatisfaction regarding the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Authority or by its staff when acting in the course of their duties. Examples of this could be:

- Delay or failure to provide a service.
- Dissatisfaction with our policies
- Failure to provide adequate standards of service.
- Failure to fulfil statutory responsibilities.
- An employee's attitude or behaviour
- Dissatisfaction or concerns with the way we handle your personal information.



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1.5 What is not a complaint?

- A request for service
- A request for information or explanation of policy or procedures
- Making an appeal following a decision about procedure or policy e.g. requesting an internal review following a Freedom of Information request response

1.6 What happens when I complain to you?

We will review your complaint to determine if it falls within one of the complaints categories. Please see more information in our Feedback, Compliments & Complaints Policy [Feedback Compliments and Complaints Policy](#)

1.7 Corporate Complaints

- We will acknowledge your complaint within 48 hours.
- After receiving your statement, we will investigate it and get back to you within 28 working days.
- If we are unable to respond to your inquiry within 28 days, we will inform you and provide an explanation.
- We will treat your complaint seriously and ensure that you receive a full and fair response.
- We will put things right for you if we can and learn from any mistakes to make improvements to our services.
- We will let you know if we agree with part or all of your complaint, apologising and considering appropriate actions to provide a remedy for any service failure. In the event that we disagree with your view of our services, we will explain why. We hope this will assist you to understand matters better, even if some of your concerns remain.
- In order to improve the quality of our service, we will review the lessons learned from considering complaints on a regular basis. Consequently, the outcome of our consideration of your complaint may assist others who use our services in improving their experiences.

1.8 Data Protection Complaints

The way we deal with complaints relating to how we handle your personal information is determined by legislation and will be reviewed and responded to by the Authority's Data Protection Officer (DPO). Complaints of this nature will be dealt with within 10 working days.

For Data Protection complaints contact the Data Protection Officer via email: dpo@essex-fire.gov.uk



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1.9 Safeguarding Complaints

Safeguarding complaints should be passed directly to the Community Development and Safeguarding Manager for ECFRS via Vulnerable.Adults@essex-fire.gov.uk

The Community Development and Safeguarding Manager, on receipt of the written complaint or verbal account of the complaint, will then liaise with the Safeguarding Responsible Person.

The Community Development and Safeguarding Manager and Responsible Person will decide whether to liaise with another agency, e.g., police or social care services, or Local Authority Designated Officer, or whether there is an internal case required.

1.10 Complaints about other organisations

If your complaint concerns other organisations such as the police or ambulance service or an independent service provider, we will forward it to the relevant organisation with your consent. If your complaint involves the Authority and another body, there will be full co-operation and co-ordination to resolve your complaint to ensure you receive a co-ordinated response.

1.11 Confidentiality

We will maintain the confidentiality of all personal information and not disclose it outside the Authority without your permission unless we are legally obliged to do so. However, if we are informed of anything that makes us think that an individual is unsafe or at risk of being harmed, we will pass this on to the appropriate authority or service for action.

1.12 Unreasonably persistent 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 with the Authority, we refer to as 'unreasonably persistent complainants'. In these exceptional circumstances we will take action to limit their contact with our Service. Please see more information Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Policy [Feedback Compliments and Complaints Policy](#)

1.13 Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

The Authority has a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of its staff. We do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, abusive, offensive or threatening. In such cases, we may not give the complainant warning of that action.



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2. What if I disagree with your response to my complaint?

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

- Use our online form <http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/contact>
- Telephone: 01376 576299
- Email: informationgovernance@essex-fire.gov.uk
- Post: Information Services, Kelvedon Park, Rivenhall, Witham, CM8 3HB

Alternatively, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman at

Website www.lgo.org.uk:

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4471

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0300 061 0614 Email: 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.

3. Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is commonly understood as raising concerns about misconduct within an organisation or within an independent structure associated with it. It is important for members of the public and members of staff to understand that proof is not required. It doesn't matter if the concern is latterly judged unfounded providing that the whistleblower is genuinely troubled by the event in question at the time.

Concerns that can be raised include but are not limited to:

- Unsafe working practices / conditions
- Impropriety
- Breach of procedure or policy
- Neglect of duty
- Breach of acceptable standards of ethical / professional conduct
- A criminal offence
- Suspicion of fraud
- A bullying culture (across a team or organisation rather than an individual instance which should be managed against the Bullying and Harassment Policy)
- Inadequate training or induction for staff



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- Deliberate concealment of information in relation to any of the above.

If you suspect an instance of malpractice you will need to exercise judgement before bringing the situation to light. If the inaction or lapse of standards seems to be minor, then it may be sufficient to bring the matter to the attention of the person who appears to be at fault.

Please see more information the Whistleblowing Policy.

Monitoring and assurance

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