



**CORPORATE PLANNING & PERFORMANCE**

**INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

**COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS & COMPLIMENTS POLICY**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Scope of the policy**

At the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) we are committed to continually improving the service we provide to our communities and recognise that to achieve this goal we must listen and respond to the views of the public.

This Policy is intended to ensure that our procedures in relation to complaints, comments and compliments are user focussed, fair, proportionate, consistent, accessible and easily understood. We will use the feedback we receive to monitor our performance and will incorporate this information into our planning and governance processes in order to continually improve our Service.

We are keen to hear examples of good practice, excellent service delivery; individual acts of bravery or heroism, or of the simple attention to detail which exemplifies the caring service we provide to Scotland's communities.

While we will always strive to do our best, we know that we won't always get it right. In instances where our standards of service are questioned, we welcome the opportunity to investigate the circumstances, are committed to correcting any lapses and to using the learning outcomes to improve our Service.

### **1.2 Exclusions from this policy**

This Policy does not cover complaints from our own employees about internal processes or other employees. Separate internal policies exist for such issues. It also does not cover claims for compensation; these should be directed to SFRS's Legal Services Section.

This Policy reflects the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Guidance on Model Complaints Handling Procedures.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

This document details how we manage feedback in the form of complaints, comments and compliments received by the Service. Definitions of these are:

### 2.1 Complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action by one or more members of the public. This may be about the standard of our service provided by us or on our behalf, or the manner in which it was provided.

Complaints may relate to:

- failure to provide a service
- inadequate standard of service delivery
- dissatisfaction with service policy
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- the Service's failure to follow the appropriate administrative processes

A complaint is not:

- a routine first time request for a service
- a request for compensation only
- where issues relating to the complaint are being or have been considered by a court or tribunal
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

### 2.2 Comments

Comments can cover a wide variety of subjects and usually relate to personal feedback or an opinion expressed by a member of the public.

These can include concerns that members of the public have in relation to fire safety issues. Where appropriate, comments may be considered to be complaints and treated accordingly.

## **2.3 Compliments**

A compliment is praise by a service user for a service provided, or to an individual for their actions.

## **3. PRINCIPLES OF THE POLICY**

### **3.1 General**

The driving principle of this Policy is that SFRS is committed to continually improving the service it provides. Feedback from the public is a vital component of this aim, whether recognising and celebrating positive comments, or investigating and challenging poor performance.

### **3.2 Complaints**

A complaint may be made by anyone who is dissatisfied with our service, or by someone acting on their behalf and with their consent. Any member of the public requiring assistance in making a complaint may contact the service by any of the following methods:-

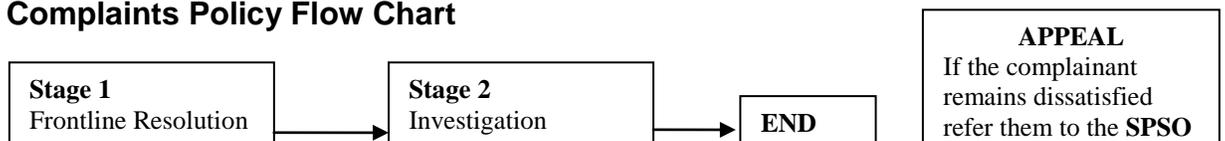
- in person at any of our premises
- by letter, Complaints Officer, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Bothwell Road, Hamilton, ML3 0EA.
- by telephone, 01698 300999
- by completing a web form at [www.firescotland.gov.uk](http://www.firescotland.gov.uk)

We value all complaints. We treat all complaints including anonymous complaints seriously and will take action to consider them further, wherever this is appropriate. We will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take action, we may decide not to pursue it further. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by the Complaints Officer.

If we pursue an anonymous complaint, we will record the issues as an anonymous complaint on the complaints system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

All complaints shall be handled confidentially, and no complainant should suffer any fear of reprisal from SFRS. SFRS has a two stage complaints handling process.

### 3.3 Complaints Policy Flow Chart



#### Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage. The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible, within **five working days** of receipt of the complaint.

#### Stage 2 – Investigation

Where it has not been possible to achieve frontline resolution or where a complaint is complex and requires detailed investigation, this will be handled at stage two.

Stage two, investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the complainant a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our **final position**.

The complaint must be acknowledged within **three working days** and a full response provided to the complainant as soon as possible and within **20 working days**.

### **Appeal**

Should the complainant feel that no satisfactory resolution has been achieved following this process; the complainant can ask the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO), to carry out an independent external review of their complaint. The complainant must be advised of this process.

It is important to note that the SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where the complainant has not gone all the way through the Service's complaints procedure
- more than 12 months after the complainant became aware of the matter they want to complain about
- where issues relating to the complaint have been or are being considered in court.

## **4. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **4.1 The Board of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

This handling policy and procedure is owned by the Board as the body responsible for maintaining and administering the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

#### **4.2 Chief Officer**

The Board delegates as it deems appropriate to the Chief Officer, who in turn delegates this function to the Deputy Chief Officer.

#### **4.3 Deputy Chief Officer**

The Deputy Chief Officer has overall responsibility for the management of the Complaints Policy and Procedure. Day to day application of the complaints function is coordinated by the Head of Corporate Planning & Performance.

#### **4.4 Complaints Officer (Head of Corporate Planning & Performance)**

The Complaints Officer shall oversee the central recording of all complaints, the allocation of complaints for investigation, the outcomes of investigation, responses to complainants, and the use of feedback from complaints to improve Service performance.

#### **4.5 Director/Local Senior Officer**

If the complaint is not resolved at frontline resolution, it shall be acknowledged by the service within three working days and allocated by the Complaints Officer to an appropriate Manager for stage two investigation.

Once allocated a complaint at stage two investigation, the Director/Local Senior Officer or their nominated representative shall have responsibility for ensuring that the complaint is fully investigated within the required timescales.

#### **4.6 Investigating Officers**

Any member of staff given responsibility for investigating a complaint should carry out a full investigation within the required timescales. Copies of all investigation papers should be forwarded to the centralised Complaints administration function.

Advice and guidance on conducting an investigation can be sought from the Complaints administration function.

#### **4.7 Administration Section**

Administration of this Policy will be managed by the Public Access Officer on behalf of the Complaints Officer and shall ensure the complaint does not duplicate, form part of or relate to another pending or completed complaint. Also included in the administration of complaints, comments and compliments are areas which aim to achieve effective records management and service learning from complaints and include:

- Receive, acknowledge and allocate reference numbers for all complaints, comments and compliments
- Assign to appropriate personnel and liaise with Investigating Officer
- Monitor timescales and responses
- Facilitate centralised record management of each complaint in line the Public Records Scotland Act 2011, Data Protection Act 1998 and the services Information Security policies
- Collate and report statistics to SFRS management

## **4.8 All Staff**

### **4.8.1 Complaints**

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straight forward customer complaints as close to the point of service delivery as possible. All staff should aim to resolve stage one complaints. Where frontline resolution is achieved, this shall be reported to the Complaints administration function at Hamilton.

Where frontline resolution has not been achieved or the complaint is complex and not appropriate to being resolved at frontline stage, the complaint will be passed to stage two.

### **4.8.2 Comments/Compliments**

Any staff member may receive a comment or compliment. Comments and compliments should be acknowledged and forwarded to Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Bothwell Road, Hamilton, ML3 0EA.

## **5. MONITOR AND REVIEW**

### **Learning from Complaints**

This Policy is designed to allow the capture and use of feedback from any of our customers with a view to improving the service we deliver. At the earliest opportunity following the closure of the complaint, the Director/Local Senior Officer should always make sure that the personnel involved understand the findings of the investigation and any recommendations made.

The Complaints Officer will review the information gathered from complaints on a regular basis and consider whether our services could be improved as a result of any complaints received and resolved within timescales.

As a minimum the Service will:

- Use complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints
- Take action to reduce the risk of recurrence
- Record the details of corrective action in the complaints file, and systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery.

Where the need for service improvement has been identified the Service will use risk management processes to ensure that action is taken by a suitable owner within an agreed target date. These actions will be monitored by the Corporate Risk Management function to ensure that the corporate issue has been resolved.

Performance indicators will be produced showing the numbers and types of complaints, comments and compliments received and within timescales. These indicators will form part of our suite of internal performance management indicators, which are reported quarterly to the Senior Leadership Team and the Board of SFRS. The SFRS will publish annual complaints statistics within its Public Performance Report.

## **6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Leaflets explaining the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure, and how to make or handle a complaint, are available within each SFRS public reception area. This Policy and Procedure is also available on our website at [www.firescotland.gov.uk](http://www.firescotland.gov.uk)

## **6.1 Unacceptable Actions/Aggressive Behaviour**

Whilst fully supporting the right of persons to complain, we expect our staff to be treated courteously at all times, and violent or abusive language or behaviour towards them is unacceptable. Where there is a threat or use of physical violence or verbal abuse towards our staff, all direct contact with the complainant will cease and the behaviour may be reported to the Police. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have published an Unacceptable Actions Policy which provides guidance on how the SPSO will handle issues of this nature. The SFRS takes a similar stance on this issue to ensure appropriate action is taken to protect our staff.

## **6.2 Unreasonable Demands or Persistence**

What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances and seriousness of the issues raised by the complainant. Examples of this can include demanding responses within an unrealistic time-scale, insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff. Where it is felt that a complainant is making unreasonable demands, the Complaints Officer may make the decision to restrict their access to staff either by appointing a liaison officer as a contact or require the complainant to contact the office in writing only.

Where a complainant has exhausted our complaints procedure and continues to dispute the outcome of their complaint, they will once again be advised to contact the SPSO and informed that no further discussion will take place on this issue unless they can provide new information relating to the complaint.

## **6.3 Data Protection Act**

All information in relation to comments, compliments and complaints will be processed in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.

**7. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS/REFERENCE**

Complaints, Comments & Compliments Handling Procedure

Data Protection Policy

Equality Impact Assessment

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Guidance