



Policy – Feedback and complaints policy

Policy owner: Comms and Engagement

This policy applies to the following members of staff:

All staff

Responsible staff must ensure that any visitors or those with remote access to Service sites (guests, contractors, temporary staff etc.) are aware that this policy also applies to them.

Policy purpose

This policy explains what we will do as an organisation, who it applies to and why. For an explanation of how this will be delivered, refer to any procedure and process documents in the Supporting resources section)

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) is 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.

The purpose of the Feedback and Complaints Policy is to ensure that Complaints, Compliments, Concerns and Comments (4 C's) are appropriately administered, recorded and acknowledged and, where necessary, investigated. Members of the public can be assured that when lodging a complaint they will be treated in a fair, reasonable and consistent manner. This will apply to all Service personnel and has been based on guidance issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

Compliments and complaints about service provision give an indication of how well the Service is carrying out its functions and where improvement can be made where appropriate.

The Service upholds the view that everyone has the right to expect a good service from public bodies and to have things put right if it goes wrong. Good complaints handling means that the public receive the service they are entitled to expect. It must focus on outcomes that are fair, proportionate and sensitive to the complainant's needs. The process should be clear, straightforward and readily accessible.

It is important to acknowledge that people may be reluctant to complain due to fear of consequences, and every effort must be made to enable people to tell us about their experiences, and not to feel disadvantaged by doing so. We promise you will not receive any unfavourable treatment as a result of making a complaint or giving feedback.

Statements of intent

We will:

- create a culture which encourages and welcomes feedback which can be acted upon to improve the Service.
- provide clear and widely available guidance about how to feedback to the Service.
- conduct a thorough, honest and timely investigation and provide a full and understandable response.
- share learning across the Service for action, where appropriate.
- promote a prompt, open, flexible dialogue with the complainant throughout the duration of the investigation and the final response to the complaint.
- provide complainants with sufficient support to enable them to participate fully in the complaints process and provide additional support where required.
- Provide a consistent approach to every member of public that has an interaction or receives services from the Service.

Key information

Definitions of complaint, concern, comment and compliment

Complaint

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.

Concern

Those 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.

Comment

An idea or suggestion which the Service could use to improve experience or the safety and effectiveness of its service delivery.

Compliment

Somebody telling the Service about something it did well.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

- Complaints Officer – This will be the person from the Communications and Engagement Team that will facilitate the complaints process.
- Investigating Officer – This person will be identified by the Service Lead or Head of Department to investigate the complaint.
- Service Lead or Head of Department – This will be the person that has the responsibility for a particular service and is responsible for approving the investigation and response



Key timescales (time scales will start from date complaint is received)

- Receipt - Complaints are deemed to have been received when first contact is made by the complainant with any member of the Service.
- Acknowledgement – A new complaint needs to be acknowledged in writing or over the phone with the complainant within 3 working days from when the complaint was initially received by the Service.
- Appointing an investigating officer – The Service Lead will appoint an investigating officer (Grade 7 or above) within 5 working days to complete the investigation and produce the written response.
- Investigating officer contact complainant – They will make contact within 7 working days to discuss the issues that have been raised and clarify points before proceeding with the investigation.
- Complete investigation and written response – The investigating officer will complete the investigation and produce a written response for the Service Lead to review and approve within 28 working days, which will include the outcome of the complaint. This must be shared with the Complaints Officer for quality checking before being sent to complainant.
- Retention of data – the data held will be securely stored for six years plus the current year.

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. In addition, some complainants may put an unreasonable demand on our service by lodging many or repeated complaints, or repeatedly pursuing unreasonable outcomes from an investigation.

In all cases where we feel someone is being unreasonably persistent in complaining, or their behaviour is unacceptable, we will refer to our [Unreasonable Behaviour Procedure](#).

Out of scope complaints

Complaints falling under this definition are those:

- Made by members of staff, including members of the public who were employed by the Service up to and including six months prior to the complaint, which will be sent to HR for investigation under the Grievance Procedure or



which should fall under the 'whistleblowing' code. This is true even when they are representing a member of public.

- About a Member of the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority, which will be sent to the Democratic Services and Corporate Support Manager for investigation against the Member's Code of Conduct.
- About damage caused by staff on duty, which will be sent to Risk and Insurance for investigation as part of the insurance claims procedure.
- Relating to allegations of the abuse of children, young people or vulnerable adults, which will be sent to the Safeguarding Lead.
- About criminal acts, when the process for investigating will be agreed with HR and the appropriate Service Lead/ Head of Department, only when the complainant refuses to report the matter to the Police.
- Subject to due legal process.
- About civil matters, which will only be processed (against the criteria set for normal complaints) when the matter brings the Service into disrepute, such as if they involve multiple people or could cause reputational damage.
- More than twelve months old. These 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.
- About how the Service has handled personal data. There is a separate process operated by the Information Governance Team to process complaints of this nature.

Monitoring and assurance

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

