



HUMBERSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Service Improvement

Professional Standards Complaints Policy

Owner	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Responsible person	Head of Corporate Assurance
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What we must do well



How we support our communities



We value and support the people we employ



We efficiently manage the Service

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that complaints or matters of concern are properly administered, recorded, acknowledged and as necessary investigated. The policy will ensure that the Complainant and any Humberside Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) personnel involved are treated confidentially and kept fully informed. Where necessary any amendments to Service procedures as a result of the complaint will be implemented and communicated.

HFRS are committed to dealing with external complaints in a timely and efficient manner, we shall endeavour to deal with complaints from start to finish within one month where possible, whilst adhering to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen guidance of 12 weeks.

HFRS will treat all complaints seriously, investigate the cause thoroughly, reporting back to the originator of the complaint. The Service will implement necessary actions where identified.

Core Code of Ethics

HFRS has adopted the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Service is committed to the ethical principles of the Code and strives to apply them in all we do, therefore, those principles are reflected in this Policy.

National Guidance

Any National Guidance which has been adopted by HFRS, will be reflected in this Policy.

2. EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

HFRS has a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, and a commitment, to ensure it does not discriminate either directly or indirectly in any of its functions and services nor in its treatment of staff, in relation to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, gender reassignment or marriage and civil partnership. It also has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, employees and service users.

The Policy is accessible on our website and available on request in other languages and formats, the Service also utilises language line if necessary.

3. AIM/OBJECTIVES

To ensure all complaints are acknowledged, investigated and finalised as a matter of priority and any actions as a result of the complaint are followed up.

- To acknowledge all feedback to the Service.
- To acknowledge complaints to HFRS in writing 5 working days of receipt.
- To investigate and finalise complaints as soon as possible.

- To record all complaints in the Complaints Register, recording the following criteria for reporting purposes:
 - Number and type of complaints received
 - Number and type of allegations made
 - Number and type of conduct matters raised
 - Who the complaints, allegations and conduct matters related to (including characteristics and role)
 - How the complaints, allegations and conduct matters were handled and the outcomes (i.e. upheld or dismissed).
 - Who raised the complaint or conduct matter (i.e. member of the public or staff)?
- To investigate all complaints received by HFRS.
- To inform the Complainant in writing of the outcome of investigation into the complaint and any actions taken.
- To ensure the number of complaints and compliments are communicated both internally and externally.
- To advise the Complainant of the right to have the complaint referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO).

4. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- [Equality Impact Analysis](#)
- Legal References
There are no specific legislative requirements relevant to this policy.
- National Guidance
There is no specific National Guidance relevant to this policy.
- [UK Central Government Complaint Standards](#)
- [LGSCO Guidance on Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities](#)
- [Complaints Policy Delivery Guidance](#)
- [LGSCO 'Children's Statutory Complaints Process' Guide](#)

5. SERVICE PROCEDURE

Definition: A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, conduct, or lack of action by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Further definitions associated with the complaints process are outlined at [Appendix A](#). Employees should pursue grievances relating to their own employment through the Service's Grievance Policy **or raise concerns in line with the Service's Whistleblowing Policy.**

Complaints relating to private matters where an employee is not on duty, will not ordinarily be investigated unless deemed necessary by the Complaints Officer.

- A Head of Function holds the reference for handling complaints and is referred to as the Complaints Officer.
- The Complaints Policy is administered by the Feedback Officer who reports to the Complaints Officer.
- The role of the Feedback Officer is to respond to, analyse, manage and publicise customer focussed activities such as complaints, compliments, and comments, making recommendations to support continuous Service improvement.
- The Feedback Officer should endeavour to speak to the Complainant to establish if the complaint needs to be investigated or can be resolved through discussion. They will also determine which Policy their enquiry will be relevant to e.g. The Complaints Policy, Whistleblowing, Disciplinary, etc. (see [Appendix B](#) for the process to follow)
- Complaints can be made in numerous ways such as in person, at a Station or at Service Headquarters (SHQ), by email, letter, and telephone or through HFRS website and social media.
- All complaints shall be handled in line with data protection legislation.
- If a complaint is specific to child protection or an adult with care and support needs, then a copy of the complaint should also be sent to the Allegations Officer. The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be notified in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy.
- The LGO 'Children's statutory complaints process' guide for practitioners will be utilised for any complaints involving Children.
- A 'Register of Complaints' is maintained at Service Headquarters and shows details of the complaint, notes on the method of handling and results of investigations carried out, along with any other relevant matters.
- Complaints received which are anonymous cannot always be investigated, however appropriate actions may be taken dependent on the nature of the complaint, at the discretion of the Complaints Officer. Disciplinary action will only be taken as the result of an investigation.
- In all cases the Complainant must be treated in a courteous and confidential manner and the complaint, including acknowledgement and full documentation, must be handled efficiently and confidentially by the officers involved and treated as a matter of urgency.
- Where the subject of a complaint is a member of HFRS staff, they must be informed about the complaint against them (unless otherwise decided due to compromising an investigation).

6. HANDLING OF A COMPLAINT

Acknowledgement

- Complaints can be received in writing or verbally and assistance will be given to Complainants who need any additional support in submitting their complaint. If an individual telephones to make a complaint the Officer taking the complaint

- may log this on the PP14 on their behalf and forward to the Feedback Officer.
- The Complainant will be asked to share background information, including age/ethnicity/ disability etc., to monitor complaint submissions for trends.

Complaints against the Service

- Once received at Service Headquarters an acknowledgement communication will be sent to the Complainant within 5 working days.
- Within the acknowledgement will be a 'statement of complaint' which will confirm our understanding of the complaint, ensuring we have fully understood the nature and parameters of the complaint.
- The acknowledgement communication will also give information of how the complaint will be investigated and when we hope to have an outcome from the investigation, and how we will keep the Complainant informed.
- Complaints that are considered to be vexatious, threatening, or abusive will not be allowed to continue. This should be communicated to the Complainant.

Complaints against a Member of the Fire Authority

Should the complaint relate to a Member of the Fire Authority, it shall not be progressed under the Complaints Policy but instead must be reported to the Monitoring Officer for investigation.

Investigation and Allocation of Investigating Officer

Once received, it must be determined by the Feedback Officer or Complaints Officer, if it should be progressed under the Complaints Policy or another appropriate policy (see [Appendix B](#) if to be progressed under a different policy).

If progressed under the Complaints Policy an Investigating Officer will be assigned by the Feedback Officer. When allocated, the Investigating Officer will be given a timeframe of 2 weeks (additional time to be negotiated if required) to investigate and report their findings.

The investigation will be carried out by the most appropriate member of staff, decided by the Complaints Officer, and will be carried out with advice and guidance from the Feedback Officer using the [Complaints Policy Delivery Guidance](#).

The investigation should be carried out as a matter of priority with evidence gathered and relevant individuals interviewed where necessary. The investigation shall remain confidential throughout.

Once the investigation return has been received by the Feedback Officer, it shall be discussed with the Complaints Officer to determine the response to the Complainant and recommendations for any necessary actions within the Service.

If, during the investigation, the investigating officer believes that there may be issues around Discipline or Performance & Capability then they will contact the HR team as soon as possible who will give appropriate advice (see [Appendix B](#)).

Should the investigation take longer than one month the Complainant will be notified, informing them of the progress of their complaint. The Complainant shall be updated, if necessary, on the progress of their complaint on a monthly basis.

Finalising the Complaint

Once the investigation is finalised the report is then to be forwarded to the Feedback Officer electronically.

The complaint shall then be finalised with a letter to the Complainant to include:

- The statement of their complaint which was agreed initially
- Brief details of the investigation
- The outcome of the complaint and reasons behind the decision

Where a complaint is considered to be valid, there should be no attempt to make excuses. The validity of such a complaint will be assessed by the Complaints Officer and, where upheld, an apology should be made with any necessary remedial action taken if deemed necessary.

Complainant's Right to Challenge Outcome Decision

If the Complainant disagrees, they can challenge the decision; the Complainant is given the opportunity to respond within two weeks of the final letter.

Should the Complainant challenge the decision, the complaint will then be reviewed by an officer not previously involved in the original investigation, within one month.

Dealing With Persistent or Unreasonable Complainants

Generally, dealing with a complaint is a straightforward process, but in a minority of cases individuals pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint, can have significant resource issues for the Service or impact inappropriately on its employees and Members. This can occur whilst complaints are being investigated, or once the Service has concluded the complaint investigation. When this happens, it may result in the Complainant being identified as 'unreasonable'.

The procedures outlined in the Policy Delivery Guidance are intended to ensure that the Service deals with these Complainants in a fair and proportionate way, whilst protecting our staff from abusive, aggressive, or unreasonable behaviour. It helps Complainants and staff understand clearly what is expected of them and what action may be taken. These procedures can also be shared with Complainants if they start to behave unreasonably, which will help to manage their expectations and behaviour.

Communication

If necessary, outcomes from a complaint will be communicated to the Service through

internal communications. For example, to communicate a learning point from a complaint or reiterate a Service Policy.

All staff shall be made aware of the complaints policy and given the relevant contact within the organisation should they require further clarity.

Complaints will be analysed by type and communicated on our website.

The Complaints Officer will advise the procurement team of any complaints relating to sexual or physical abuse, financial crime, pollution, libel, slander or defamation. These instances would be reported to our insurers and allows a balanced view of the Service in relation to insurance risk.

Feedback

The Service will seek to obtain feedback as to how complaints are handled when sending out the complaint outcome letter. The Service will communicate the findings of this feedback on the website, and through relevant publications where appropriate.

Staff involved in Complaints

Complaints that are made about members of staff, if considered a complaint, will be investigated under this policy.

Staff must be made aware of complaints made against them and given the opportunity to comment.

The outcome of the complaint should then be communicated back to the member of staff through a relevant Manager.

If staff are interviewed in relation to the complaint, they should be given the opportunity to have a friend / representative with them.

Other support routes are detailed below:

7. WHO CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT OR ADVICE TO EMPLOYEES

We are committed to maintaining a safe and supportive work environment for everyone. Below are internal and external routes staff can use to speak up, raise a concern and get support.

Most speaking up happens through conversations with supervisors and line managers where challenges are raised and resolved quickly. We strive for a culture where that is normal, everyday practice and encourage you to explore this option it may well be the easiest and simplest way of resolving matters. However, you have other options: Station Managers, Group Managers, TLT and SLT member with responsibility for the subject matter you are speaking up about.

Via your line manager

Your line manager is a key point of contact for reporting concerns and seeking support. They are here to listen, provide guidance, and ensure that your concerns

are addressed appropriately. Whether you have questions about workplace policies, encounter issues with colleagues, or require assistance with personal matters affecting your work, your line manager is there to support you.

If, for any reason, you feel uncomfortable discussing your concerns with your line manager, we have established multiple channels for reporting concerns anonymously or confidentially.

Through our Policies and our Professional Standards Policies

Various routes are included in our Professional Standards Policies and other Policies listed below:

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption
- Dignity at Work (anti Bullying and Harassment)
- Disciplinary
- Exits From the Service
- Equality and Inclusion
- Grievance
- Menopause
- Mediation
- Personal Relationships at Work Policy
- Safety Event Reporting Recording and Investigation Arrangements
- Whistleblowing

Our internal bullying and harassment hotline

Bullying will not be tolerated within Humberside Fire and Rescue Service. Our Dignity at Work policy clearly defines bullying and how to report it.

The Service's 'Zero Tolerance' campaign has a very simple strapline - **SUPPORT - CHALLENGE - REPORT** - and we encourage our employees to do just that.

Internal Freedom to Speak Up Routes

The Freedom to Speak Up model was developed in health and has six key elements; we have used the model as the basis for the HFRS process. How we implement 'Valuing' and 'Modelling' Speaking Up within HFRS will be developed from the 'ground up' by listening to staff about how line managers and the organisation can value and model Speaking Up.

Our 'Freedom to Speak Up Guardian' can support you to speak up if you feel unable to do so. The Guardian will ensure that people who speak up are thanked for doing so, that the issues they raise are responded to, and that the person speaking up receives feedback on the actions taken. You can find out more about the guardian role [here](#).

Additional information relating to Freedom to Speak Up Routes can be found [here](#).

Contact HR

You can contact your HR team, in complete confidence, on: 01482 567572.

This number will take you through to one of our HR advisers who will listen to what has caused you to feel the way you do.

You don't need to provide names and you will receive completely confidential advice as to how to manage any issues you raise.

HMICFRS Independent reporting line

The independent reporting line (IRL) form is a tool for fire and rescue service staff to confidentially pass information to HMICFRS, which as an independent body is responsible for inspecting fire and rescue services on their efficiency, effectiveness and how well they look after their people.

The reporting line can be accessed [here](#).

Independent Speak Up

This service aims to provide a safe space for staff to speak up when something isn't right in the workplace:

- Discrimination, victimisation and harassment (on gender, sexual orientation, disability)
- Misogyny and violence against women and girls
- Health and safety breaches
- Fraud and corruption
- Poor or unsafe working practices

The service is available online or via phone [here](#).

Service users can remain anonymous or can choose to provide their name and contact details which will then be shared for confidential use by the Fire Service

Employee Assistance Programme

As part of an ongoing commitment to employee wellbeing, Humberside Fire and Rescue Service Occupational Health Team are very pleased to offer all employees confidential support, with free access to emotional and practical support through CiC's Confidential Care Service.

The service is provided by CiC, an external organisation, who are entirely independent, so support and advice are completely confidential. You can call the Confidential Care line as often and for as long as you need to discuss any issues you would like support with.

The Confidential Care service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and is accessed by calling the freephone number: 0800 085 1376.

You may also wish to speak to:

- A colleague
- A trade union representative
- The Humberside Fire Authority Counselling Service
- Protect – UK Charity

You may wish to discuss the concern with a colleague or trade union representative first and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are other colleagues who share the same concerns. A trade union representative or work colleague may accompany a member of staff at any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns raised.

Further guidance is set out under the Whistleblowing Policy.

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN AND COMMISSION FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLAND

The Service endeavours to deal with all complaints in a satisfactory manner, however, where this is not achieved the person can seek independent advice or contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614

Online complaints form - <https://complaints.lgo.org.uk/complaint-form>

Website: <https://www.lgo.org.uk>

The purpose of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is:

- To remedy injustice through impartial, fair and rigorous investigation.
- Improve local services through learning.

**If you require further guidance / information relating to this document, please
contact Corporate Assurance**

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Allegation	<p>What is being complained about.</p> <p>An allegation may be made by one or more Complainants about the service they received from an FRS. It may, for example, be about service-wide fire safety initiatives, the organisation of service resources or general service standards. However, it can also be about the conduct of any person working within the service.</p> <p>A complaint case may involve more than one allegation.</p>
Complainant	A person who makes a complaint.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction by a member of the public about the service they have received from the fire and rescue service.
Conduct	Acts, omissions, statements, and decisions (whether actual, alleged or inferred).
Conduct Matter	Any matter that is not and has not been the subject of a complaint, which indicates that a member of staff may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in such a way that would justify disciplinary proceedings.
Misconduct	Acts, omissions, statements, and decisions (whether actual, alleged or inferred) that are not in line with Service policy.
Gross Misconduct	Acts which constitute gross misconduct, are those resulting in a serious breach of contractual terms and thus potentially liable for summary dismissal.

APPENDIX B: COMPLAINTS PROCESS FLOWCHART

Complaints Process

