



DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

IM 4 - Complaints & Compliments Procedure

To be used in conjunction with the [Corporate Governance Policy Statement](#)

Information Management (IM)

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Ref No:	IM 4	FRS:	DWFRS
Date of Issue:	09/08/2019	Review Due:	01/06/2024
Version No:	V10.0	Review Completed:	25/06/2019

1. Purpose & Definition

- 1.1. This procedure sets out how Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) deals with complaints and compliments. It aims to make sure the Service records and acts on these promptly so that we can recognise good performance and identify opportunities for improvement in the future.
- 1.2. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any element of the Service's work. Our aim is to make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- 1.3. This procedure does not cover fire safety complaints or matters that should be dealt with under the Discipline, Resolving Issues at Work or Whistle Blowing procedures.

- 1.4. All complaints are handled sensitively, informing/involving only those who have a need to know and following the relevant data protection requirements.

2. Procedure Principles

2.1. Complaints

- 2.1.1. Complaints can be made in person, by phone, in writing or via the complaints form on the website. If you receive a complaint, try to resolve any concerns on the spot, using good customer care practice. If you are unable to do this, advise the complainant of their right to make a formal complaint and explain the complaints procedure to them.
- 2.1.2. If the complainant would like to make a formal complaint, you need to:
- obtain contact details of the complainant
 - make a note of the nature of the complaint (including any details of any DWFRS members of staff involved)
 - find out what action (if any) have already been taken
 - ask the complainant what further action they would like taken
 - advise that complaints are dealt with during normal office hours Monday - Friday
 - forward the above information to the Information Management (IM) Team
 - consider if it is a matter for the Police. If so, contact the Duty Area Manger.
- 2.1.3. If the complainant prefers to contact the IM Team directly, they can do so.
- 2.1.4. If the complaint relates to discrimination, record this against the relevant equality characteristics and encourage the complainant to also report this through the Hate Crime Reporting tool at www.dorsetforyou.com/hatecrime or <http://www.wiltshire.police.uk/hate-crime>.
- 2.1.5. If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, assure them that any details given will remain confidential. Take as much detail as possible around the complaint and forward this to the IM Team.
- 2.1.6. If you believe that there may be some safeguarding issues surrounding a complaint received, please follow the [Safeguarding procedure](#).
- 2.1.7. Upon receipt of a complaint, the IM team will:
- record any details available within the complaints database and assign the complaint to an appropriate Investigating Officer for investigation
 - appoint an Investigating Officer and notify them by email and by phone to make sure they are able to deal with the complaint within the timescale.
- 2.1.8. The Investigating Officer will contact the complainant and investigate the complaint within 14 working days.
- 2.1.9. Once the investigation is complete, the Investigating Officer will write to the complainant to advise them of the outcome.

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2.1.10. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response or the way in which their complaint was handled, they can appeal within 28 working days of receiving a response. The Investigating Officer then refers the complaint to a Senior Officer for further investigation and advise IM of the complainant's dissatisfaction.

2.2. Records management

2.2.1. There is a central database ([Compliments & Complaints \(C&C\)](#)) for recording compliments and complaints which is administered by IM Team.

2.2.2. All members of staff throughout DWFRS have access to this database and are allocated compliments and complaints via an automatic alert.

2.2.2.1. If you are allocated a complaint to investigate, you should do so by following the procedures set out in this document and use the guidance provided to assist you with filling in the database and sending correspondence.

2.3. Vexatious Complaint Procedure

2.3.1. This procedure is designed to deal with complaints where:

- the Complaints Procedure has been correctly implemented as far as possible; and nothing further can reasonably be done to rectify a real or perceived problem
- no material element of a complaint has been overlooked or inadequately addressed
- the procedure will only be implemented following careful consideration by the Head of Information, Knowledge and Communications and the Director of Corporate Services
- the complainant will be informed, in writing, that they have been considered a vexatious complainant under this procedure and that a sanction has been invoked as a last resort in order to conclude the matter. The complainant will have the right of appeal to the Senior Leadership Team or to seek independent legal advice
- action that may be taken against the vexatious complainant include:
 - limiting contact to a named member of staff; and allowing written correspondence only. If members of staff are to withdraw from a telephone conversation with the complainant the following statement may be used: "I am sorry I am unable to deal with your complaint, I understand your complaint is being dealt with by [name the individual] only, please contact them in writing"
 - suspending all contact with the complainant whilst seeking legal advice
 - notifying the complainant that the Service has fully responded to all issues and that continuing contact on the same matter will serve no purpose as all matters have been thoroughly investigated. The complainant will also be notified that any further correspondence on the same matter will be acknowledged but not answered, unless any significant new matters are raised in writing.

2.3.2. Where a complainant repeatedly and unnecessarily dials 999 the incidents will be reported to the Police.

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- 2.3.3. Where a complainant harasses, and/or repeatedly threatens or abuses a member of staff, the incidents will be reported to the Police.
- 2.3.4. All members of staff involved in the complaint or those who are likely to come into contact with the complainant, must be informed of the action taken.
- 2.3.5. The IM Team will record the reasons why a complainant has been deemed vexatious and the action taken. See supporting information for more information on [vexatious complaints](#).

2.4. Compliments

- 2.4.1. If you receive a compliment directly (on station or within your department), acknowledge it by sending a [Compliment Acknowledgement](#) if you have enough information and are able to do so.
- 2.4.2. Enter the compliment details into the database, notifying your line manager and copying in the individual(s) involved within the space provided in the database. If you are unable to enter the compliment yourself, please make sure you acknowledge receipt of the compliment in a timely fashion and send the original to the Information Management Administrator for processing.
- 2.4.2.1. Please refer to the [Compliments & Complaints – User Guide](#) for instructions on how to enter a compliment.
- 2.4.3. If you feel the compliment deserves media attention, please forward a copy to the Media team so the detail can be published (anonymously) in the Service's magazine(s).

3. Responsibilities

3.1. Investigating Officers

- 3.1.1. Contact the complainant within three working days (via phone, in person or email/written correspondence) to:
- explain that you are investigating their complaint and provide your contact details
 - clarify the complaint and the desired outcome. Discuss alternative ways of handling the issue, if an option
 - check if the complainant needs further support (interpreter, visual/audio aids) to ensure they fully understand the process
 - explain the procedure and that the result of their complaint may lead to a disciplinary hearing where they may be asked to give evidence
 - obtain a signed statement (where appropriate)
 - clarify what you will do next and when you will be in touch again.
- 3.1.2. If appropriate, send an acknowledgement letter if the complaint is received in writing and/or not resolved during initial discussions.
- 3.1.3. If you need to forward the complaint to a member of your team to deal with, you may do so via the complaints database or by contacting the Information Management team.

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- 3.1.4. Notify HR if the complaint is about, or likely to impact on, a member of staff.
- 3.1.5. Carry out the appropriate investigations to resolve the complaint (see [investigation and interview tips](#)). Wherever possible, complete the investigation within 14 working days. If the investigation is likely to exceed 14 days, advise the complainant of an expected date of completion and advise IM or enter the revised date into the database.
- 3.1.6. Contact the complainant within 14 working days to advise them of the outcome of the investigation, stating:
 - the findings of the investigation
 - any action taken or to be taken
 - an apology, if appropriate.
- 3.1.7. If appropriate, you can discuss the outcome of the investigation with the complainant over the telephone instead of sending a letter. If you do, please keep a record of this as [per Section 2.2.](#)
- 3.1.8. Update the complaints database or email all documentation relating to the complaint to the IM team for recording ([see section 2.2 – records management](#)).
- 3.1.9. Discuss any founded complaint relating to the performance of a member of staff with an HR Manager or Business Partner. If required, forward them a copy of the complaint detail (via the system as a Copy to) or ask Information Management to do this if you do not have access to the complaints database.
- 3.1.10. Consider how we can learn from the complaint to make improvements to our services and advise IM who will monitor any actions identified.
- 3.1.11. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response, or the complaint cannot be resolved within a reasonable amount of time, refer the complaint to Information Management who will assign a member of SLT for further investigation. [See letter template – Complaint not satisfied.](#)
- 3.2. **Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)**
 - 3.2.1. Investigate all complaints that the Investigating Officer is unable to resolve. Aim to do this within one month of receiving notification of the complaint and advise the IM team (via database or email) of the new date of completion.
 - 3.2.2. Maintain communication with the complainant during the process, especially if you are likely to need more time to investigate.
 - 3.2.3. Write to the complainant at the end of your investigation to clarify steps previously taken by the Investigating Officer, details of your findings, any actions taken and the next step. Make sure you forward a copy of any correspondence to the IM team for entry into the database. Please see [SLT Review Findings letter template](#) if need be.
 - 3.2.4. If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant can take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 3.3. **Information Management (IM) Team**

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- 3.3.1. Record complaints in the complaints database and assign the complaint to an appropriate Investigating Officer for investigation.
- 3.3.2. Notify the appointed Investigating Officer by email and by phone that they have been allocated a complaint, to make sure they are able to deal with the complaint within the timescale.
- 3.3.3. Ensure the correct application of the complaints process.
- 3.3.4. Monitor the trends of causes in complaints and report these to the relevant Heads of Service, including persistent complaints, so that we can identify improvements to the Service.
- 3.3.5. Maintain accurate information on the website relating to the complaints process.
- 3.3.6. Record and refer complaints made to Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) members.
- 3.3.7. Support staff by providing training in the process and the use of the electronic system (as applicable).
- 3.3.8. Monitor any actions identified for improvement.
- 3.3.9. Log all compliments received.
- 3.3.10. Monitor the number of complaints and compliments received and report these regularly to SLT.
- 3.4. **HR**
- 3.4.1. When notified of a complaint regarding a member of staff, contact the Investigating Officer with any additional information relating to the behaviour or on-going issues connected to that member of staff.
- 3.4.2. Assist an Investigating Officer with any background information or detail that may be available in the person's personal reference file (PRF) that you deem relevant to their investigation.
- 3.4.3. Notify the IM team if a complaint is to be dealt with by another process (such as; discipline) so it can be closed and logged accordingly.

4. Monitoring & Assurance

4.1. Procedure Management

- 4.1.1. IM will monitor the number and types of complaints received and regularly report these to SLT and the Finance, Governance and Audit Committee.

4.2. Learning and Development

- 4.2.1. This procedure will be raised with all staff on induction.
- 4.2.2. All members of staff using the complaints database should refer to the [guidance document](#).
- 4.2.3. Investigating Officers should refer to the [key steps and interview and investigation techniques](#) and contact the Information Management team for further advice and support.

5. Document Reference

5.1. Database

[Compliments & Complaints \(C&C\)](#)

5.2. Document References

[EPR 1 – Resolving Issues at Work](#)

[EPR 2 – Discipline Procedure](#)

[CG 4 – Whistleblowing](#)

[EDI 1 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[PCE 1 – Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups](#)

5.3. Supporting Information

[Letter template – Compliment Acknowledge](#)

[Letter template – Complaint Acknowledge](#)

[Letter template – Complaint Resolution](#)

[Letter template – Complaint Not Satisfied](#)

[Letter template – SLT Review Findings](#)

[Compliments & Complaints – User Guide](#)

[Guidance for Investigating Officers](#)

[Vexatious complaints](#)

6. Document Management

Policy Statement Reference: [Corporate Governance](#)

Owner	Review Date	Author	Status
Lisa Smith	01/06/2024	Lisa Smith	Published

6.1. Version Control:

Version	Page & Par Ref	Date	Changes Made	Authorised By
V10.0	Entire document	26/07/2019	Accepted suggestions	Lisa Smith
V9.1	Entire document	25/06/2019	Reviewed – Plain English suggestions provided	Tonya Saben
V9.0	Page 5 (3.2.3) & 7	22/10/2018	Added Letter template – SLT Review Findings per the outcome of an investigation. No other changes made.	Lisa Smith/Tonya Saben
V8.0	Page 5 / 3.1.10	09/10/2018	Updated procedure for dissatisfied complaint to be delegated to a	Lisa Smith/Tonya Saben

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			member of SLT for further investigation, removing line management responsibility.	
V7.0	Page 3	13/09/2018	Updated 2.3.1, third bullet with new department head title	Tonya Saben
	Page 4	06/09/2018	Spelling within 2.4	
V6.0	Page 1 & 7	12/06/2018	Updated policy statement reference in line with recent changes and removed policy blurb from template.	Tonya Saben
V5.0	Pages 2 – 4 and page 7	13/03/2018	<p>Section 2.1.2, last bullet point, changed terminology from Silver Duty Officer to Duty Area Manager.</p> <p>Section 2.2, Records Management, updated section as all members of staff have access to the database now.</p> <p>Section 2.4, Compliments, added links to Compliment Acknowledgement letter template and User guidance.</p> <p>Added Section 5.1, a link to the Compliments & Complaints (C&C) database.</p>	Tonya Saben
V4.0	Page 3, 5 & 6	26/01/2018	<p>Section 2.3.1 Changed vexations complaint section referring to Fire Authority to Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>Section 3.2 Changed responsibility heading from Head of Department to Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>Section 3.2.4 Removed statement with regard to unresolved</p>	Lisa Smith / Tonya Saben

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			complaints referring complaint to the Clerk of the Fire Authority. Section 3.3.6 Removed reference to Heads of Department and Fire Authority leaving SLT as final level of investigation.	
V3.0	Page 1	27/06/2017	Updated Policy Statement section with standardized description. No other changes made.	Tonya Saben
V2.0	Page 1 Page 7 / 5.1 & 5.2	06/06/2016	Added link to IM policy. Added document links	Tonya Saben
V1.0		22/02/2016	Published	Tonya Saben

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