



RBFRS Policy Document

Policy Information	Details
Policy Name	Complaints, Comments & Compliments Policy and Procedure
Author	Business Support Lead
Owner	Head of Corporate Services
Protective Marking	Official
Version	5
Status	Significant changes to policy, subject to consultation following A&G
Issue Date	To be issued following agreement by A&G and consultation
Review Date	2 Years from issue date

Policy Statement	Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) welcomes and values any feedback whether it is a compliment, comment or complaint. We are committed to resolving complaints in a positive, thorough and fair manner, to ensure we provide the best service to the people of Royal Berkshire.
Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to ensure that complaints, comments and compliments are logged and investigated with due care and that complaints and their outcomes are logged for monitoring purposes.
Scope	This policy applies to all complaints, comments and compliments received from members of the public or organisations. Separate procedures are in place for internal complaints or a complaint against a specific employee.
Supporting Information	Complaints form

Revision History			
Revision	Description	Author	Date
4	Complaint policy updated to reflect minor changes in process for handling complaints, a complaint definition and inclusion of process for Comments and Compliments. Policy template updated.	Business Support Lead	01/2022
5	Policy updated to include process for dealing with unreasonable behaviour. Appeals process has been streamlined. Guidance on accessibility has been included along with a new monitoring mechanism to help identify trends. Response time has changed to remove lack of clarity over definition of working day. Policy template updated. Flowchart added as appendix A.	Business Support Lead	03/2022
Authorisation			
Audit and Governance Committee	Report submitted for Committee on 23 March 2022		

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Complaints and Comments Policy and Procedure

Complaints and Comments Introduction

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS), is committed to delivering excellent customer service and recognises the importance of customer feedback. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us evaluate and improve the services that we provide.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that complaints, comments and compliments are recorded and investigated thoroughly, professionally and in a timely manner with their outcomes logged for learning and monitoring purposes.

Complaints and Comments Definition

Definition of a Complaint

RBFRS defines a complaint as 'Any communication from outside the organisation expressing dissatisfaction with the service provided or actions taken by RBFRS staff members.'

Where comments are received through social media, we will direct individuals to the formal complaints process. We will not discuss personal information via any social media channel.

Anonymous complaints will be reviewed but depending on the information provided, these can be difficult to investigate or resolve effectively, and therefore may not be recorded as a complaint.

Complaints and Comments Policy

An online enquiry form is available on RBFRS's website through our contact us page where individuals can directly share their complaint with the Service. We will acknowledge complaints sent via this method within 1 working day of receipt (based on office hours 09.00 – 17.00, Monday – Friday). Alternatively, all members of the Service have access to the complaints procedure and will be ready to act positively towards anyone seeking to complain. To assist this, every complaint will be readily accepted and the information diligently gathered using the [complaints form](#) as a record of the event. Details of the complaints procedure can be provided to anyone seeking them. If the person receiving the complaint cannot resolve the complaint immediately, they should advise the Complainant that their complaint will be investigated and that they will be contacted within 10 days with a full response. If a full response is not possible within 10 days, they will be advised when a response is likely to be given.

During Office Hours (Monday – Friday 09.00 – 17.00) every complaints must be sent to the Business Support Team (complimentsandcomplaints@rbfrs.co.uk) as soon as possible, attaching the [complaints form](#) with appropriate sections completed. Where the complaint has not been resolved by the person receiving the complaint, the Business Support Team will forward the relevant details to the appropriate Head of Service or Senior Manager and Accountable Director. The Head of Service or Senior Manager will be responsible for allocating an appropriate Investigating Officer to investigate the complaint.

Out of hours, the Duty Officer must be notified as soon as possible. If the person receiving the complaint has been unable to resolve the complaint satisfactorily, the Duty Officer will be responsible for deciding whether an urgent investigation is required and if so, will appoint an

investigating officer. The Business Support Team, appropriate Head of Service and DCFO must still be informed via complaints form, for monitoring and recording purposes.

The Investigating Officer will be responsible for dealing with the investigation, recording all details and liaising directly with the complainant. The Investigating Officer is also responsible for informing the Business Support Team, Head of Service and accountable Director of the outcome of the investigation via email and an updated [complaints form](#).

If the complaint is regarding a specific individual, then HR advice must be sought by the investigating Officer.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they have the right to appeal to the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive. The complainant should provide full details in writing of which parts of the complaint remain unresolved as well as their desired outcome. The appeal should be emailed to complimentsandcomplaints@rbfrs.co.uk or sent in writing to the Complaints Team, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Reading, RG31 7SD.

Appeals should be made within 28 days of our response to the complaint. However, we may consider any exceptional reasons that a complainant might have in not meeting this time limit.

Once an appeal has been received, we will acknowledge this within three working days, fully investigate and respond to the appeal within 28 days. If a full response is not possible within 28 days, the complainant will be advised when a response is likely to be given.

In the event they are not satisfied with the Chief Fire Officer's / Chief Executive's decision, as a final resort, they can refer the complaint to the Ombudsman. The details are available from the [Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman website](#).

Complaints and Comments Procedure

At all times personnel should be polite to people making complaints regardless of the attitude of the complainant or the nature of the complaint.

COMPLAINTS DO NOT HAVE TO BE MADE IN WRITING

Where possible, endeavour to resolve the complaint immediately.

When receiving any complaint, the following action should be taken:

1. The person receiving the complaint must always give their name and designation.
2. All complaints must be recorded on the [complaints form](#) ensuring that all sections are fully completed. If the complaint is in writing, the complaints form must be attached to it.
3. The Business Support Team must be notified via email (complimentsandcomplaints@rbfrs.co.uk), with a copy of the complaints form.
4. During working hours, the Business Support Team will assign a unique complaint number and forward the relevant details to the appropriate Head of Service or Senior Manager and Accountable Director. The Head of Service or Senior Manager will be responsible for allocating an appropriate Investigating Officer to investigate the complaint.
- 4b. If the complaint is outside of office hours (Monday to Friday 09.00 – 17.00) the Duty Officer must also be informed and they will decide whether an urgent investigation is required. If this is the case, they will be responsible for appointing an investigating officer.

5. When the complaint has been investigated, the Investigating Officer must record:
- Details of the investigation (including correspondence, witness statements and notes of telephone conversations).
 - The action taken.
 - The date of the response to Complainant.
 - Whether the Complainant is satisfied or not.

All correspondence, witness statements and telephone notes etc. to be emailed, along with the complaint form, to the Business Support Team and copied to the Head of Service and accountable Director. If the information relates to a staff member, then this will be stored by HR rather than Business Support. All correspondence (electronic and paper/hard copy) must be kept securely during the course of the investigation and deleted/destroyed at close of the investigation.

Details of the complaint will still be recorded in the event of the complainant no longer wishing to proceed with their complaint. The details will be recorded as a comment using the same procedure as for complaints.

The Business Support Team or HR will retain comments and complaint files for 2 years after close. Records may be retained for a further period if they have on-going business value or if there is specific legislation which requires the information to be held for a further period. Retention periods of complaints which relate to employees may be determined by employment policies and associated retention periods.

Accessibility

In the event you wish to make a complaint it is useful to put the details of your complaint in writing.

If this is something you do not feel comfortable doing or have difficulty in doing you can:

- appoint an advocate to act on your behalf
- ask a friend, carer or family member to help you
- ask an organisation like Citizens Advice Bureau to help you.

We will require written consent from any 3rd party to act on behalf of an individual.

Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy & Procedure

Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Introduction

RBFRS is committed to ensuring that all complaints are dealt with in an open, fair and timely manner. We aim to respond to all complaints positively and ensure that complainants are satisfied with the way their complaint has been handled.

In a minority of cases, people pursue their complaints in a way that is unreasonable. Complainants may behave unacceptably, or be unreasonably persistent in their contact with the Service. This is resource intensive and hinders our services to other residents of Berkshire. We will not tolerate abusive, offensive, threatening or other forms of unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour.

Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy & Procedure

The Unreasonable Complainants policy is designed to deal with complainants 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.

Examples of unreasonable actions and behaviours include:

- Consistently refuses to co-operate with the complaints process
- Repeatedly refuses to accept that issues are not within the power of the Service to investigate, change or influence
- Makes repetitive, persistent and unreasonable demands that are not achievable or realistic
- Verbally abusive or intimidating towards our staff
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach, pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with a variety of organisations
- Makes the same complaint repeatedly after the complaints process has concluded and refusing to refer to the Ombudsman for an independent view
- Repeatedly refuses to accept documented evidence as factual
- Persistently complains about or challenges an issue based on an historic and irreversible decision or incident.
- Places excessive demands on the time and resource of our employees whilst an enquiry or complaint is still being considered
- Makes malicious or unfounded allegations about our employees
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations that the complainant insists make these new complaints

When we consider someone's behaviour unreasonable, we will explain why and ask them to change it. We will also warn them that, if the behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict their contact with the Service.

Examples of the restrictions the Service could include:

- Implementing a temporary access restriction whereby the individual may only contact the Service via one designated route such as a generic email address or telephone number
- Provide the individual with a temporary single point of contact within the Service
- Limit the number and duration of an individual's contact by stipulating set times per week / month they may contact the Service
- Advise the individual in writing that the matter has become exhausted and all further correspondence will be read but in the absence of any new or additional information this will be logged only
- Terminate conversations where an individual is aggressive, abusive or offensive; a warning will be given before terminating

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of our staff, we may report the matter to the police or consider taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the customer prior warning.

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive or appropriate deputy in their absence will decide whether the circumstances justify any restriction of access. Deciding whether a complainant is unreasonable requires each case to be independently reviewed, with the complainant's behaviour and circumstances taken into account.

In the event of access being restricted, the complainant will be informed in writing about the decisions taken and we will state how long any restriction will apply for before it is reconsidered and say how the decision can be challenged.

If, as a last resort, the Service decides to end all communication with the Complainant due to unreasonable behaviour, the complainant will be referred to the [Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman website](#).

The Business Support Team will keep record of reasons why a complainant has been deemed unreasonable and the actions taken.

Compliments Policy and Procedure

Compliments Introduction

RBFRS welcomes and values any form of feedback. Where a compliment has been received about the service provided by a member of RBFRS we will, where possible, pass the feedback onto the individual(s) concerned and Head of Service/Director. We will also, where appropriate, respond to the sender of the compliment.

Compliment Definition

Our People Strategy sets out our commitment to ensuring that everyone's contribution is valued and positive behaviours are recognised. Our staff are an integral part of the organisation and we share positive feedback to celebrate their achievements. We encourage the recognition of excellent service, for example through our internal publications and nominations for our annual award ceremony.

Compliments Responsibilities

The person receiving the compliment should forward to Business Support for recording.

Business Support will record the compliment, inform the relevant Head of Service/Director and individual concerned (if not already completed), and assess on a case-by-case basis if a response is to be sent to the sender.

Compliments Procedure

1. Compliment is received into the Business Support Team. Compliments do not have to be made in writing, however if received verbally, as much information as possible should be captured and sent to the Business Support Team by email.
2. The compliment will be recorded by a member of the Business Support Team.
3. A response may be sent to the compliment received, which will be assessed on a case by case basis.
4. The compliment will be sent to the individual/team concerned, copying their line manager.

The Business Support Team will retain compliment files for 2 years. Records may be retained for a further period if they have on-going business value or if there is specific legislation which requires the information to be held for a further period.

Complaints, Comments & Compliments Performance Monitoring

Corporate Services will produce a monthly highlights report to assist the Senior Leadership Team to identify and monitor any trends where appropriate.

Corporate Services will also produce a more detailed analysis of complaints, comments and compliments, and this will be reported quarterly to the Strategic Performance Board and then onto the Audit and Governance Committee.

Anonymised information will be reported in all of the complaints reports. Policy and Procedure Review

This policy will be reviewed within 2 years of its publication date or when required by a change in circumstances.

Appendix A – Complaint Process Flowchart

