

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



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Compliments & Complaints Policy

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1 Introduction

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service is committed to delivering a quality service at all times. If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service we would like to hear from you. Equally, if you are pleased with the services, or have a suggestion on how we might improve, do let us know.

The purpose of the Compliments and Complaints Policy is to ensure that compliments and complaints are properly 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.

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

They can be received in a number of ways:

- In person: At any fire station or office
- Telephone: 01376 576 000
- Email: compliments.complaints@essex-fire.gov.uk
- Online: Using the compliments & complaints submission form – [Click Here](#)
- Fax: 01376 570 466
- Post: Kelvedon Park,
Rivenhall, Witham
Essex
CM8 3HB

If you require any assistance with making your complaint we will provide any reasonable adjustment or advice you require. If this is the case please contact Corporate Communications using the contact details above.

2 Definitions

A Compliment is an expression of praise or satisfaction with the service provided by ECFRS or its employees in the course of their duties.

A Complaint is an expression of discontent or dissatisfaction regarding the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the ECFRS or by its staff when acting in the course of their duties.

3 Compliment Procedure

Compliments will be logged in the Compliment Database and allocated a unique reference number and retained for future use.

All written correspondence will be kept on file by the relevant station as well as Corporate Communications ready for inspections if required.

4 Complaint Procedure

We need to know the exact nature of your complaint. Please provide as much information as possible about the service provided, the individuals or department involved and why you felt the service we offered did not meet your expectations.

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service takes every complaint and suggestion seriously. We record the complaints received and the subsequent actions taken. The number of complaints, their nature and the way in which they are dealt with are all monitored.

The complaint will be logged in the Complaint Database and allocated a unique reference number. Written acknowledgement will be sent within five working days of receipt, which will include details of the nominated officer investigating the complaint.

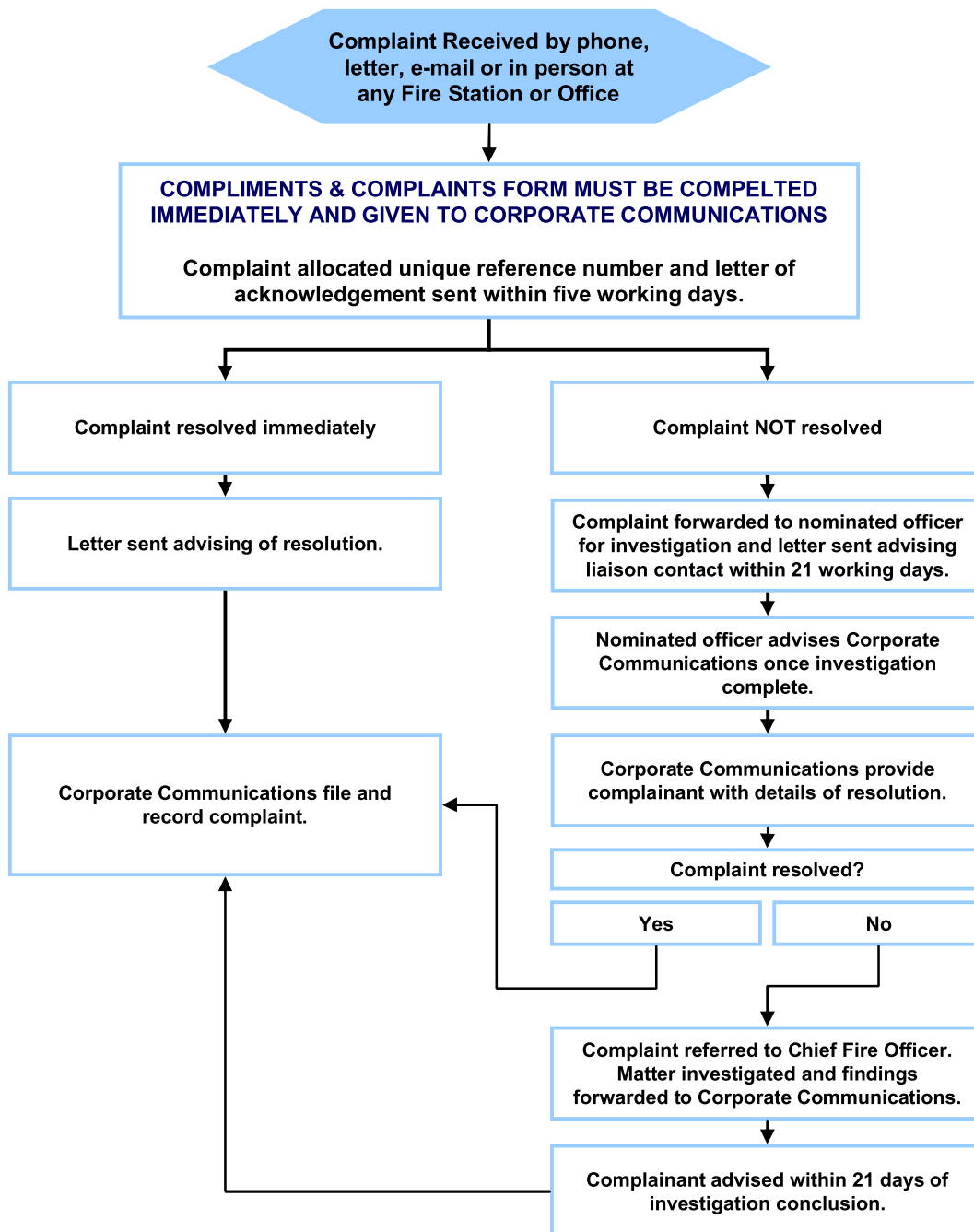
The complaint will be investigated thoroughly by the appropriate parties and the complainant will be advised of the outcome. If the nature of the complaint requires further investigation complainant will be advised of this in writing along with an explanation of why this is required.

Written response to the complaint will be sent within 21 days of the date the complaint was logged, detailing the findings and of any actions taken.

Personal details will be held on our database for the purpose of investigating the complaint and monitoring trends only. These details will be retained for up to five years. After five years, personal details will be removed from our records.

If the findings of the investigation are not satisfactory the complainant can appeal to the Corporate Communications Manager, who will initiate a further review. If the complainant is still not satisfied the matter can be referred to the Chief Fire Officer. A Principle Officer will be nominated to review the case and a reply from the Chief Fire Office will be sent to the complainant within 28 days.

Complaints Process



If the response from the Chief Fire Officer is not satisfactory, the complaint can be investigated further by the Local Government Ombudsman. They may carry out an independent investigation of your complaint. However, the Ombudsman will usually only consider the complaint once our complaints procedure has been exhausted.

For more information about the Ombudsman, visit their website at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/> or contact them at:

The Local Government Ombudsman
10th Floor Millbank Tower
Millbank, London SW1P 4QP
t: 020 7217 4620 (advice line: 0845 602 1983)
f: 020 7217 4621
e: enquiries@lgo.org.uk

5 Insurance Claims

Potential insurance claims cannot be dealt with through the complaints procedure.

If you require any further information or clarification regarding the Essex County Fire & Rescue Compliments and Complaints Policy, please contact Corporate Communications who will be pleased to assist you.

6 Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who make them. As part of this service they do not normally limit the contact complainants have with their offices.

However there are a small number of complainants who, because of the frequency of their contact with ECFRS, hinder consideration of their or other people's, complaints. We refer to such complainants as 'unreasonably persistent complainants' and, exceptionally, we will take action to limit their contact with our offices.

The decision to restrict access to our offices will be taken at Assistant Chief Fire Officer level and will normally follow a prior warning to the complainant. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options we are most likely to consider are:

- Requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- Requiring contact to take place with a named officer;
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their future contacts with us.

In all cases where we decide to treat someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant, we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour falls into that category, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it. If we decide to carry on treating someone as an unreasonably persistent complainant and we are still investigating their complaint six months later, we will carry out a review and decide if restrictions will continue.

Where a complainant whose case is closed persists in communicating with us about it, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant. In such cases, we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence which affects our decision on the complaint we will simply acknowledge it or place it on the file with no acknowledgement.

New complaints from people who have come under the unreasonably persistent complainants policy will be treated on their merits.

7 Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service (ECFRS) has a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of their staff.

ECFRS is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who make them. As part of this service they do not normally limit the contact complainants have with their offices. However ECFRS does not expect their staff to tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive or threatening, and they will take action to protect staff from that behaviour.

When we consider that a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable we will tell them why we find their behaviour unreasonable and we will ask them to change it. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, we will take action to restrict the complainant's contact with our offices.

The decision to restrict access to our offices will be taken at Assistant Chief Fire Officer level. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options we are most likely to consider are:

- Requesting contact in a particular form (for example, letters only);
- Requiring contact to take place with a named officer;

- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times; and/or
- Asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct.

In all cases we will write to tell the complainant why we believe his or her behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. We will also tell them how they can challenge the decision if they disagree with it.

Where a complainant continues to behave in a way which is unacceptable, we may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint.

Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of ECFRS staff, we will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, we may not give the complainant prior warning of that action.