

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
Meeting	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
Meeting Date	20 NOVEMBER 2023
Report of	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Report Sponsor(s)	DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
Subject	COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS MONITORING REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Members are provided with a summary of compliments and complaints received during the 6-month period 1 February 2023 to 31 July 2023.

Receiving compliments and recognising a job well done and taking the time to acknowledge someone's efforts, is one of the ways in which the Service is working towards 'Our Story' and aspirations to be a great place to work, to put people first and strive to be the best in everything we do.

The Service recorded 30 externally received compliments, a 58% decrease from the previous 6-month period (71). 14 compliments mention attendance and quality of work of staff, 11 related to visits and events attended by the Service, 3 for rescues of people or animals or assisting other services and 1 each for staff conduct and appearance and donations and charitable works.

Complaints received from the public are regrettable and give the Service the opportunity to review our work and how we can improve. Over the same period, the Service initially received 21 complaints from members of the public, of these 1 complaint was withdrawn, 2 complaints transferred to the People and Culture and 1 to Community Safety leaving 17 complaints to be processed. This is a 21% increase compared with the previous 6 monthly reporting period (14). 6 complaints were upheld, 1 partially upheld, 10 complaints not upheld. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority received no complaints.

Of the 17 complaints processed, 8 complaints were about operational incidents, 3 personnel, 2 vehicle/driving and 1 each for administration, Business Safety, Community Safety and miscellaneous. 9 complaints related to the Sheffield area (including HQ, Training and Development Centre), 2 each for Rotherham and Barnsley and Doncaster, 1 covered more than one area and 1 where no location could be assigned. We were able to provide 14 of the 17 complainants with a response within the 20 working day target with 3 taking 21, 25 and 37 days.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members are recommended to:-

- a) Note the number of compliments received
- b) Note the increase in the number of complaints received and processed

CONTENTS

Main Report

BACKGROUND

1. The Service's 'Our Story' includes our aspirations to be a great place to work, to put people first and strive to be the best in everything we do. Recognising a job well done and taking the time to acknowledge someone's efforts is a great way of bringing this to life and making the most of daily interactions and informal thanks. The Service publishes internal compliments and thanks from teams and individuals in the Bulletin weekly staff communication. Additionally in May 2023, the Service introduced a new internal Intranet landing/home page, which includes a 'Kudos' space where staff can internally show thanks to a colleague(s) for a job well done.
2. We receive many compliments and messages of thanks at the time the Service carries out its essential work supporting the communities of South Yorkshire. This could be at an emergency incident, completing a home safety check and fitting smoke alarms for our most vulnerable members of the community or circulating information on our social media platforms.
3. External compliments are received via our customer focused communication facilities: website online form, dedicated customer care email address and telephone number. These are acknowledged and passed to the individuals being thanked and wider to the Service via the Bulletin notifications. From February to July 2023, 30 external compliments were received via social media, emails, telephone and the SYFR website form and every compliment is assigned a category, a summary is provided below.

Category	Feb 22 – Jul 22	Aug 22 – Jan 23	Feb 23 – Jul 23
A: Conduct & Appearance of Staff	6	0	1
B: Efficiency (speed of attendance, work and manner)	56	61	14
C: Visits, Open Days and Events	9	7	11
D: Humane (rescue of people or animals or assisting other services)	4	3	2
E: Donations and Charitable Works	3	0	1
Total	78	71	30

4. The Service has also communicated 34 bulletin and 25 Kudos internal thanks, including thanks for providing support, training, individual pieces of work and congratulations on achievements.
5. A selection of external compliments and extracts of the kind words provided for the diverse work and support SYFR delivers to the communities of South Yorkshire is provided below.

February 2023

Email thanks from multi agency partners for the Wildfire Exercise attendance at Hatfield Moor:
"This was a multiagency Wildfire exercise at Hatfield Moors that involved Humberside Fire Service, Natural England, Doncaster Council and the Environment Agency – thank you to all crews attended for their efforts"

A voicemail received from a member of the public to say thank you to a crew who attended their address.

"I just want to thank the fire service. I was unconscious in my flat for 24 hours. It was the fire service who were able to help my friends and climb in over the balcony to rescue me. They then got me to hospital. Please pass on my grateful thanks."

March 2023

A phone call received from a member of the public for a ring removal assistance.

"Thank you for attending our property and removing a wedding ring, please pass our thanks to the officer in attendance".

Email thanks received from a member of the public for our assistance in gaining entry to their elderly parent's home.

"Three officers came in response to a 999 call when I had been unable to get into my Dad's house. The key was inside the lock and there was no answer. The officer in charge was highly efficient, clear in his communication with me as to what needed to be done to gain entry. He was caring and respectful and very calming. It was evident that every decision made was with respect to my Dad's home, whilst at the same time being proactive to solving the problem. Fortunately, the outcome for my Dad was positive. I have had time to think about that night and realise what an incredible team you have. Each of the men were professional, polite and efficient. Both my Dad and I are so grateful to all of them. The Officer in charge is a true leader. He took charge and dealt with everything until he was satisfied that everything was safe and secure after the event for my Dad. He was also respectful, caring and reassuring to me. Thank you to this team and for everything you all do"

April 2023

An email of thanks from a Team Leader at Yorkshire Ambulance Service for a crew.

"I'd just like to say a massive thank you on behalf of my staff from Yorkshire Ambulance Service for the support we got from the Watch Manager and crews for our Investment Day. The staff really enjoyed interacting and it was great to see input from everyone present it was great to see the interaction with lots of questions being asked from both sides. I'm sure this will give our crews the confidence to interact more when working on jobs together"

A message of thanks from a member of the public following a chimney fire at their property.

"I would like to thank the crews [x3] who attended an incident at a property at the weekend. When speaking to Fire Community Safety Officer earlier this week [the homeowner] said the firefighters who attended were so understanding and they could not thank them enough for their time, effort and kindness".

May 2023

A message of thanks from Assistant Chief Constable SY Police to all staff involved.

"I wanted to send you a quick note of thanks to express our gratitude for the first class support South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue once again offered in the efforts to find missing child". It is always acutely worrying when someone so young goes missing..... It is always enormously reassuring when we reach out and this quickly becomes a multi-agency joint effort". Thankfully as a result of our joint efforts the child was found and returned to the care and support they needed. Your continued support and the efforts of your team are always appreciated".

An email of thanks from the District Nursing Team for a crew who assisted with a palliative patient.

"They were AMAZING!! They lifted our patient safely into their bed, made him comfortable and then proceeded to complete a fire risk assessment and fit additional fire alarms. Other services declined our request for assistance but thanks to Green Watch our palliative patient remains in his home with his wife where he hopes to stay for the duration of his care. Not only were we grateful of their assistance to the District Nursing Team, the gentleman and his wife were truly appreciative too".

June 2023

An email thanks from a parent and resident for the professionalism the crews shown during an incident attendance.

"I would like to extend my gratitude to your Firefighters who attended an emergency to a tractor and trailer that had caught fire in a field. I have a son who is obsessed with fire engines and he saw your colleagues outside of our window re-filling their tanks after they had dealt with the emergency. Not only were your staff very dirty and tired but they made the absolute effort to acknowledge my son and wave to him. We eventually headed outside where he was starstruck seeing the fire engine (in real life) and the firefighters hard at work. When they

eventually had to leave they not only waved to my son but made a little a siren noise for him to hear as they drove off. My little boy was so happy. Not only did they attend an emergency but they also acknowledged a little fan on their route home. I would like to thank your colleagues for making a little persons day. Even when they were tired and hot and dirty”.

A message of thanks received from a member of the public for a crew when they attended a road traffic collision.

“We are grateful for the attendance and would like to make aware that a female Firefighter on scene stayed with the casualties and kept them calm until ambulance arrives”.

A letter of thanks received from a resident affected by a grassland fire.

“Just a brief note to say a huge and well deserved thank you to crews when they attended and dealt with the fire incident, very quickly and efficiently with two successive grassland fires at the rear of our and neighbours’ properties on the evening (of the incident date). We were very impressed with the speed of response from SYFR so once again, big thanks to all involved!”.

July 2023

An email of thanks from Independent Chair of Safeguarding Adults Board for YFR Safeguarding Officers when they attended a Safeguarding meeting in Rotherham.

“I would like to send my personal thanks to you for all your contributions and support to the Rotherham Safeguarding Peer Review this week. Your insights together with the feedback from the review team will be vital as we draw up our improvement plan together.”

A message of thanks from a member of a public for our attendance at a LGBT Pinknic event held in Sheffield City Centre.

"I would just like to say thank you to one of your staff - unfortunately I don't know their name. I went to Sheffield Pinknic last Saturday and all the firefighters who attended were so nice and helpful, but one person in particular was absolutely wonderful. This person made my day and made me feel so much better about everything."

A message of thanks received from a volunteer who has gone on to achieve employment:

"My time spent volunteering with South Yorkshire Fire Service has been incredibly rewarding, and I have gained valuable experience and developed new skills during my tenure here. I am grateful for the support, guidance, and camaraderie I have received from the entire team. I genuinely appreciate the friendships I have made, the experiences I have had, and the growth I have achieved during my time as a volunteer at South Yorkshire Fire Service. It has been an honour to work alongside such passionate individuals dedicated to making a positive impact. I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all members of the team for their collaboration and encouragement. I will cherish the memories and the valuable lessons I have learned during my time here."

SERVICE COMPLAINTS

6. The Service Complaints Policy provides a structured way for the public to express a comment, concern or a complaint and for these to be processed consistently. Similar to compliments, complaints can be received at the point of service delivery, via the customer care email address and telephone number, the SYFR website online form or via social media.
7. A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction about any service provided by SYFR that requires a full investigation followed by a form of response.
8. There are 4 stages of resolution under the Complaints:
 - Stage 1 – Complaint resolved at the point of service delivery
 - Stage 2 – Complaint resolved by the Customer Care Team or Investigating Officer
 - Stage 3 – Complaint resolved by the Chief Fire Officer
 - Stage 4 – Complaint resolved by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

9. Where someone expresses a concern, a worry or wishes to express a comment which does not initially appear to fall within the definition of a complaint, the Service will contact the person to clarify whether or not they are seeking to make a complaint, what their expectations are, how we can put things right or if no further action is required. If these are resolved at first point of contact/delivery, they are recorded under Stage 1 of the Complaints policy. If not, the Information and Governance Team (Customer Care) work with Investigating Officers to look in the concern with an aim to provide positive and acceptable responses.
10. The Service initially received 21 complaints from members of the public, of these 1 complaint was withdrawn, 2 complaints transferred to the People and Culture and 1 to Community Safety leaving 17 complaints to be processed. The Authority received no complaints within this reporting period.
11. A summary of the various channels through which complaints have reached the Service during the 6 month period 1 February 2023 to 31 July 2023. Earlier 6 month reporting periods are provided for comparison.

Category	Feb 22 – Jul 22	Aug 22 – Jan 23	Feb 23 – Jul 23
Customer Care Line	1	2	2
Other telephone	9	6	4
Customer Care e-mail	3	2	6
Other e-mail	2	1	1
Letter	1	0	0
Website online form	4	3	3
Social Media	1	0	0
In Person	0	0	1
Total	21	14	17

12. Every complaint is assigned to a category

Category	Feb 22 – Jul 22	Aug 22 – Jan 23	Feb 23 – Jul 23
Personnel	9	2	3
Vehicle/Traffic	2	4	2
Operational	3	5	8
Admin	0	1	1
Community Safety	3	0	1
Business Safety	0	0	1
Miscellaneous	3	1	1
Not SYFR	1	1	0
Total	21	14	17

13. Below is a summary of complaints received by District.

District	Feb 22 – Jul 22	Aug 22 – Jan 23	Feb 23 – Jul 23
Barnsley	3	1	2
Doncaster	5	2	2
Rotherham	5	1	2
Sheffield	5	8	9
Various (more than 1 area)	0	0	1
Not known	2	1	1
Not SYFR	1	1	0
Total	21	14	17

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

14. When a complaint is received the Information and Governance team may ask the complainant how they wish to progress their complaint, informally (Stage 1) or formally (Stage 2). 6 complaints were processed at Stage 1 and 11 at Stage 2.
15. Sometimes complainants explain they do not wish to receive a response to their concerns, nevertheless they are reassured that SYFR will review their concerns. For all others, a response is provided to the person explaining the outcome of our findings.
16. We endeavour to provide an initial acknowledgement within 3 working days and a full response within 20 working days. Of the 17 complaints, 12 received an acknowledgement within 3 working days, 1 was delayed taking 12 days and 1 complaint was anonymous. 1 complaint received a full response within the 3 days and 2 took longer than initially thought, 7 and 12 days to provide a full response.
17. 14 of the 17 complaints met the 20 working day response with 3 complaints taking 21, 25 and 37 working days to complete.
18. 6 complaints were upheld, 10 complaints not upheld and 1 complaint partially upheld; a summary of the 17 complaints received and processed is provided below.

Nature of complaint received from members of the public and outcome
<i>Complainant reported inappropriate comments from a member of staff to a member of their family following a collision with a SYFR vehicle.</i>
Resolved at Stage 1. No evidence was found to support the complaint and the crew had followed procedures and collected insurance information. The crew were reminded of `Our Story` and members of the public may have hidden disabilities. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant was unhappy with the time taken to provide some information since their retirement from the Service.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer identified that the complainant had received information on their retirement and this was provided again. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with visits carried out by Community Safety and Business Safety to their privately rented property after reporting a lack of fire alarm testing.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found that Officers had followed correct procedures when carrying out inspections to the property. The complainant was consistently supported by the Information and Governance Team, whilst the investigation was ongoing. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant reported the driving of a fire appliance round a corner, straddling both sides of a weight restricted road without sirens or lights with dash cam footage.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The complainant was unable to provide footage. The Investigating Officer visited the road which covered 3 villages and was unable to identify a SYFR vehicle travelling in the vicinity. Due to lack of evidence the complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy that a member of SYFR staff had provided a statement to be used in litigation for building safety issues.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found that this was a private matter and the member of staff had stated their role and work location within a statement. The staff member formally withdrew their statement from a court record and an apology was sent to the complainant. The complaint was upheld.

<i>Complainant unhappy they had been asked to leave their flat when the fire alarm was sounding, why had they been made to complete a form and they felt humiliated.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The complainant was called and an explanation provided. When crews arrived the complainant's apartment was indicated on the AFA panel so they were asked to evacuate to enable staff to investigate. The form was a post incident standard procedure to ensure people are informed along with a home fire safety check. Reassurances were provided that at no point was their reputation tarnished as it was found that 2 buildings were having multiple AFA panel actuations and all apartments visited in similar circumstances would be offered a home safety check. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with conversation conducted outside their home between staff members and a partner agency following a home safety check at their property.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found that a professional discussion had taken place outside the property, which included details of the visit and future work and this should have been undertaken in a confidential and private setting. An apology was provided to the complainant and the complaint was upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with manner of crew previously visiting their business and relayed whilst a second visit was taking place with a different member of staff.</i>
Resolved at Stage 1. The complainant received an apology telephone call from the Station Manager and guidance was provided to the crew. The complaint was upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with questions and comments made by staff when carrying out a safe and well visit to their home.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found evidence to support the complainant's concerns. Information was passed to People Services for further investigation under internal processes. An apology was provided to the complainant and the complaint upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with complaints department and Investigating Officer in relation to information they had been provided for their previous complaint and it was inaccurate.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer was able to identify additional details from a complex set of information and that there was no malicious intent from all staff involved. The information was provided in full to the complainant and the complaint partially upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy a crew had broken a security gate to gain access to a site where a fire had been reported.</i>
Resolved at Stage 1. The complainant was called and provided with an explanation of the actions of the crew entering the location to locate any risk to life or property. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with the flying of the PRIDE flag at a fire station.</i>
Resolved at Stage 1. An explanation of the government flag flying information was provided to the complainant with a link to this information. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant reported the driving of a vehicle on a specific road.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer identified a SYFR vehicle in the location and attempted to gather more information from the complainant. Due to no response received and lack of evidence, the complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with behaviour and comments by staff members at an incident.</i>
Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found the crew had conversations with residents around `controlled burning` in relation to the garden fire, which included laughter which could have been misinterpreted. An explanation of comments, laughter and context of this was provided to the complainant. The complaint was not upheld.
<i>Complainant unhappy with how a crew had gained access to an apartment block and the external access door being held open.</i>
Resolved at Stage 1. The complainant was called and provided with an explanation and reassurance that the security issue raised would be passed to crews for if they may visit the site in the future. The complaint was upheld.

Complainant unhappy with how crews dealt with a local flooding incident which they believed contributed to their own property being flooded by pumping from a property into the drains and that SYFR had refused to pump their property.

Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer identified Control received 340 emergency calls in the hour with 10 flood related incidents attended due to electrics, life risk or water rescue. Information provided to Control by the complainant was flood water in a back garden and correct prioritisation of resources had been applied. It was identified that no water had been pumped from a property in to the drains and the crew unblocked the outside drains allowing water to flow away. Therefore all staff had followed procedures correctly. The complaint was not upheld.

Complainant unhappy in receiving a `sorry we missed you` cards twice with no attempt to knock on their door whilst they were in their property.

Resolved at Stage 2. The Investigating Officer found that a crew were in the area posting cards to properties in the location of a recent fire but they had run out of the correct type of card to encourage community safety engagement. An apology was provided to the complainant with a reassurance that organisation and delivery of a new style leaflet for fire stations was progressing. The complaint was upheld.

APPEALS TO THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER (STAGE 3) / LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (STAGE 4)

19. One appeal was received by the Chief Fire Officer at Stage 3 of the complaints process. The complainant continued to express their dissatisfaction with the visits carried out to their rented private property by Business Fire Safety Officers and the Stage 2 complainant Investigation Officer. The Chief Fire Officer met with all staff involved and reviewed all information available. The Stage 3 complaint was not upheld and response sent to the complainant.
20. The Stage 3 appeal then progressed to a Stage 4 appeal to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman with the complainant citing similar concerns. Information was provided to the Ombudsman and the Service was notified of the following decision which is also published on the LGO website <https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/other-categories/other/23-002-830#point1>

We will not investigate Mr X's complaint. The Fire Service investigated Mr X's concerns. Its' decision to resolve the identified issues without taking formal enforcement action or prosecution is one it is entitled to make. Without evidence of fault in the decision-making process, we cannot criticise the way the Service has decided to resolve Mr X's concerns.

HMICFRS

21. Complaint statistical data is provided by the Information and Governance Manager as part of the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) data and information collection.

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR ASPIRATIONS

- Be a great place to work-** we will create the right culture, values and behaviours to make this a brilliant place to work that is inclusive for all
- Put people first-** we will spend money carefully, use our resources wisely and collaborate with others to provide the best deal to the communities we serve
- Strive to be the best in everything we do-** we will work with others, make the most of technology and develop leaders to become the very best at what we can be

CONTRIBUTION TO SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

- [HMICFRS Inspection Framework e.g. Diagnostic area and/ or diagnostic questions](#)
- [SYFR Inspection report Areas for Improvement \(AFIs\)](#)
- [Fit for the Future Improvement Objectives](#)
- [Professional Standards for Fire & Rescue Services in England](#)
- [SYFR Service Plan 2023-24 Priorities](#)
- [SYFR Community Risk Management Plan 2021-24](#)

Complaint statistics are provided as part of the HMICFRS data and information collection. Compliance with internal complaint deadlines contribute towards efficiency and areas for service improvement may be identified.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Yes
- No

If you have ticked 'Yes' please provide brief details in the box below and include the third party/parties it would involve:

CORPORATE RISK ASSESSMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY IMPLICATIONS

22. To investigate complaints and identify areas of improvement is an essential part of the Authority's overall performance and corporate governance arrangements. Reviews of performance via complaints that we received and process, provides the means through which to take remedial action where required and in doing so reduces the overall risk of failing to meet objectives and targets.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT COMPLETED

- Yes

If you have ticked 'Yes' please complete the below comment boxes providing details as follows:

Summary of any Adverse Impacts Identified:	Key Mitigating Actions Proposed and Agreed:
No potential negatives identified as there are different ways for members of the public to make complaints i.e. telephone, in person, email, on line form, translation sourced if required.	

- No
- N/A

If you have ticked 'No' or 'N/A' please complete the comments box below providing details of why an EqlA is not required/is outstanding:

HEALTH AND SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT COMPLETED

- Yes
- No
- N/A

If you have ticked 'No' or 'N/A' please complete the comments box below providing details of why a Health and Safety Risk Assessment is not required/is outstanding:

A brief anonymised summary of each complaint received is forwarded to the Health and Safety Manager to assess whether further involvement is required due to the nature of the complaint; for example it may be identified within a complaint investigation that a risk assessment may be required or amendment needed.

SCHEME OF DELEGATION

23. Under the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority [Scheme of Delegation](#) a decision *is required / *has been approved at Service level.

Delegated Power Yes
 No

If yes, please complete the comments box indicating under which delegated power.

IMPLICATIONS

24. Consider whether this report has any of the following implications and if so, address them below:., Diversity, Financial, Asset Management, Environmental and Sustainability, Fleet, Communications, ICT, Health and Safety, Data Protection, Collaboration, Legal and Industrial Relations implications have been considered in compiling this report.

Legal Implications

25. Some complaints may relate to damage to property (vehicles/buildings/land) and therefore are actually insurance claims on the Authority's public liability insurance. The process used by the Information and Governance team when processing these, ensures they are alert to potential legal implications and claims and will not admit liability where this may lead to legal proceedings against the Authority. An immediate admission of liability is not permitted under our present insurance cover.
26. Complaints can if dissatisfied always refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) or if the LGO declines to adjudicate, on for judicial review of either the complaint process or the activity complained of. This may evaluate the validity and strength of the complaint and decide whether there is a likelihood of success or sufficient public interest in taking the matter further.

Diversity Implications

27. SYFR has a responsibility, under the Equality Act 2010, to deal fairly with complaints from service users and members of the community under the nine protected characteristics. Equality and diversity implications have been considered as part of the review of the Complaints Policy and the Information and Governance Team will offer assistance and reasonable adjustments to help complainants when required.

List of background documents		
Compliment and complaint working files		
Report Author:	Name:	Tracey Wiles, Information and Governance Manager
	e-mail:	twiles@syfire.gov.uk
	Tel no:	0114 2532399