



External Concerns and Complaints Process

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) is committed to providing a professional, effective and efficient service to the community. We encourage members of the public to contact us to raise concerns or complaints about our Service or staff. This feedback is essential to assist us to continue to meet the high standards the public deserve. It is important that we actively seek feedback to gain an accurate awareness of public perception and views on the level of service we provide to our communities.

AF&RS have adopted the National Fire Chiefs Council Core Code of Ethics. These principles form the basis of everything we do. Public trust and confidence in AF&RS rely upon us demonstrating ethical behaviours. The Core Code of Ethics sets out these ethical principles:

- Putting our communities first
- Act with Integrity, being open, honest and consistent in everything we do
- Treat people with dignity and respect
- Leadership – accountability for our behaviour, decisions and actions
- Recognise and promote equality, diversity and inclusion

We believe it is important to be accountable and ensure members of the public can raise complaints and concerns and have confidence that these will be addressed quickly and fairly.

Our governance process requires us to regularly review feedback received and use this information to learn and further improve the services we provide. Depending upon the nature and severity of the concern raised it will be escalated to the appropriate level of management to ensure there is robust scrutiny and that appropriate action is taken to maintain public confidence in our Service.

This process explains how matters raised will be dealt with.

AF&RS will record details of concerns or complaints received in line with Data Protection Legislation and will analyse the information received to identify areas for improvement. A summary of this information will be published in our annual performance report.

1.2 Scope

This process applies to members of the public and third-party stakeholders. Dependent upon the nature of a concern or complaint raised, AF&RS will take appropriate action which could involve our internal investigation or disciplinary process. Should a potential criminal matter be referred to us through this process we will contact the Police to seek advice on

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the appropriate action to be taken. In addition to any criminal investigation, we will initiate our internal investigation process which may involve appointing an external investigator to ensure independence.

Matters raised by current or former members of staff or their representatives regarding employment matters are outside the scope of this process. The employee Grievance Policy and/or the Fire Authority Confidential Reporting Code may apply, depending upon the nature of the issue.

Complaints about Avon Fire Authority Members

If the complaint is about an Elected Councillor who is a Member of the Fire Authority this will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct together with details of the complaints procedure can be obtained from AF&RS's website at www.avonfire.gov.uk or by writing to the Clerk to the Authority. If your complaint is about the Fire Authority, this should be raised with the Local Government Ombudsman (details can be found on their website <http://www.lgo.org.uk/>).

2 Process

2.1 Raising a concern or complaint

This may include AF&RS as a whole, individual members of staff or specific to a service provided. Complaints or concerns can be submitted in writing, by e-mail or telephone or verbally to any AF&RS staff member. Alternatively, there is a [complaints form](#) that can be accessed on our website.

2.2 Responding to matters raised

We will acknowledge receipt of all complaints and concerns received.

If the complaint/concern is:

- Alleging any activity that may be considered criminal
- Alleging any activity which has discriminated against a person due to a protected characteristic as listed in the Equality Act (2010)
- Alleging any activity which could have a serious impact upon the reputation of the Service
- Involves an allegation of potentially serious or gross misconduct by an employee

It will be escalated to a member of the Service Leadership Board (SLB) who will determine the action to be taken.

If a complaint alleges any form of personal injury or illness has been caused by our work activities, it will be referred to the Health, Safety and Welfare Team for action.



If none of these apply it will be referred to an appropriate Manager who will undertake an investigation to gather relevant facts and supporting information. The investigation process may include interviewing and obtaining statements from any relevant persons and contacting the complainant to obtain further information or clarification. If during these investigations that is any evidence that it meets the criteria outlined above it will be referred to a member of SLB.

All investigations will be dealt with as quickly as possible and we will aim to provide a response within 28 days. The complainant will be informed of the progress and outcome and if we are unable to conclude our investigation within 28 days we will contact the complainant to explain progress. There may be legal constraints in relation to how much information can be disclosed to the complainant, for example Data Protection requirements, employee confidentiality or due to Police criminal investigations. In such cases, we will endeavour to provide as much information as we can to satisfy the complainant that the matter has been dealt with appropriately.

2.3 Challenging the outcome

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can request a review, this must be requested in writing within one month of receipt of the notification of the initial outcome. Any requests for review will be referred to a member of SLB.

2.4 Anonymous complaints

Where an anonymous complaint is received it will be referred to a member of SLB who will determine whether there is sufficient information to enable an appropriate investigation. We acknowledge that on occasion a complainant may wish to remain anonymous. However, we will work hard to create a culture of trust and confidence, whereby members of the public can raise legitimate concerns and know these will be dealt with appropriately.

Anonymous complaints may not contain sufficient factual or specific information needed to enable investigation. This could affect our ability to address the matter effectively and act upon the information.

2.5 Local Government Ombudsman

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the further investigation of a complaint, they can raise a complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman. They will have firstly attempted to address this directly with AF&RS. Information about the Local Government Ombudsman can be found on their website <http://www.lgo.org.uk/>.

2.6 Standards of conduct

AF&RS is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially. We will not tolerate behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening to our staff. If the conduct of a



complainant is considered inappropriate, this will be escalated to SLB for consideration and appropriate action. The complainant will be notified in writing of their decision.

2.7 Persistent complaints

If a complainant makes persistent or excessive complaints or submits potentially inaccurate, unfounded, malicious, or vexatious complaints this will be referred to SLB for consideration. The complainant will be notified in writing of the outcome of their decision.


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Name:	Caroline Taylor
Role:	Head of Corporate Assurance, Continuous Improvement and Planning
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