

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Service**



**Compliments and
Complaints Annual
Report 2022/2023**



Executive Summary

This report will provide an overview of all compliments and complaints received by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The compliments and complaints procedure and policy was refined in 2022, with new guidance and processes issued for registering and monitoring complaints. The process is now fully embedded within the Service, and is now standard practice for all staff.

TWFRS receive feedback by many different methods, and the compliments process is now embedded across the Service. This provides an option for service users and members of the public to provide direct feedback to staff they have interacted with, and allows the Service to recognise the members of staff where we are notified of exemplary service. The number of compliments recorded in 2022/23 was 158; a 187% increase on the previous year, which indicates both staff and members of the public are aware of methods available to register compliments.

Complaints received in 2022/23 had decreased from the previous reporting period, with 18 complaints being received and investigated. Two complaints were not for TWFRS and were in relation to other Fire and Rescue Services, one was not a formal complaint and was dealt with informally without full investigation, and one was a claim from a member of the public that was dealt with via insurance.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 TWFRS welcome all opportunities to receive feedback on the experiences of service users and members of the public, and this is used to promote continuous improvement across the Service. Feedback is an essential element of engagement with the communities served, and allows the Service to identify areas for improvement, and praise staff that have performed above and beyond their roles.
- 1.2 Investigation of instances whereby our service has fallen below standard is a crucial process for the Service, and can inform changes to internal processes to improve efficiencies.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Staff regularly interact with the public and during 2022/2023, 77,925 'official' interactions were recorded. Official interactions consist of; 33,165¹ calls to the Control room (an increase of 355), 18,725² incidents attended (an increase of 831), 22,569³ Safe and Well visits, and 3,466³ fire safety activities. The number of Safe and Well visits has increased significantly from 2021/2023 as a result of face to face visits returning following the Covid-19 pandemic. The numbers are now reflective of the figures pre-pandemic, a
- 2.2 The Service welcomes feedback in a variety of methods including face to face, postal, email and the Service's website. In 2022/2023 contacts to the compliments and complaints mailbox comprised of 158 service compliments, 18 service complaints, 2 non service complaints and 26 other contacts totaling 204 contacts. This is a 38% increase on the previous year (78).

¹ Source: Mobilising system for calls, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

² Source: IRS incident data, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

³ Source: CFRMIS for Safe and Well data and Fire Safety Audits, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

Figure 1: Contacts received 2022/23

Contact	Count
Compliments	158
Complaints	20
TWFRS	18
External – Other FRS	2
Other contacts	25
General enquiry	15
Smoke Alarm	2
Fire Safety	3
Personal Comment	4
Civil Matter	1
Overall Total	207

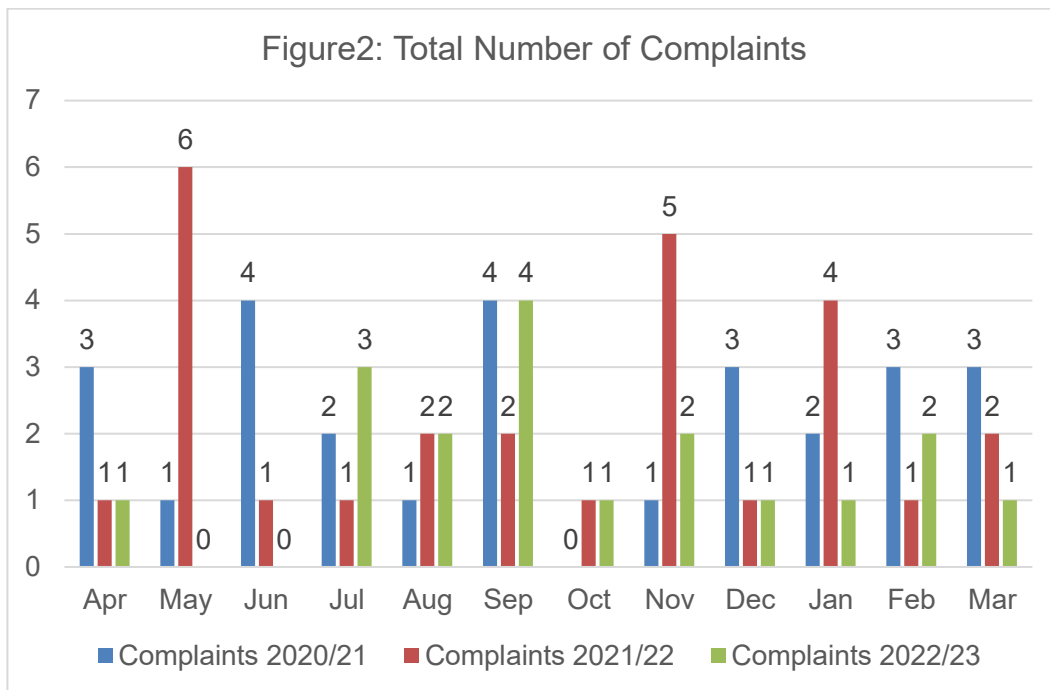
- 2.3 20 complaints were received however only 18 were investigated; two complaints received were not relating to TWFRS and were in relation to other FRS. Initial inquiries highlighted this and the complainant was referred to the correct service.
- 2.4 26 ‘other contacts’ were received via the compliments and complaints mailbox, which did not meet the criteria for a compliment or a complaint. Following a review of the contacts, the correspondence was directed to the correct department for suitable action to be taken to rectify where applicable. Examples of ‘other contacts’ received were in relation to requesting smoke alarms to be fitted in properties, which was referred to our Prevention and Education department, and person opinions expressed regarding potential industrial action.

3. 2022/23 Overview

- 3.1 The Service defines compliments as *‘praise given by a service user or partner for a service provided, or to thank an individual, team or department for their actions’*. Compliments received from members of staff are not included within this report, however positive feedback has been received internally during 2022/23 and fed back directly where appropriate.
- 3.2 An increase has been noted in compliments during 2022/23, with a 183% increase recorded from the previous year. In relation to ‘official’ interactions, the percentage is still relatively low, however the year on year increase over the previous three financial years is indicative of a positive change and awareness of Compliment policy and procedure. The Service continue to promote the policy and procedure to staff to encourage the registration of compliments where received, as it is likely that there is still contacts that are not recorded.

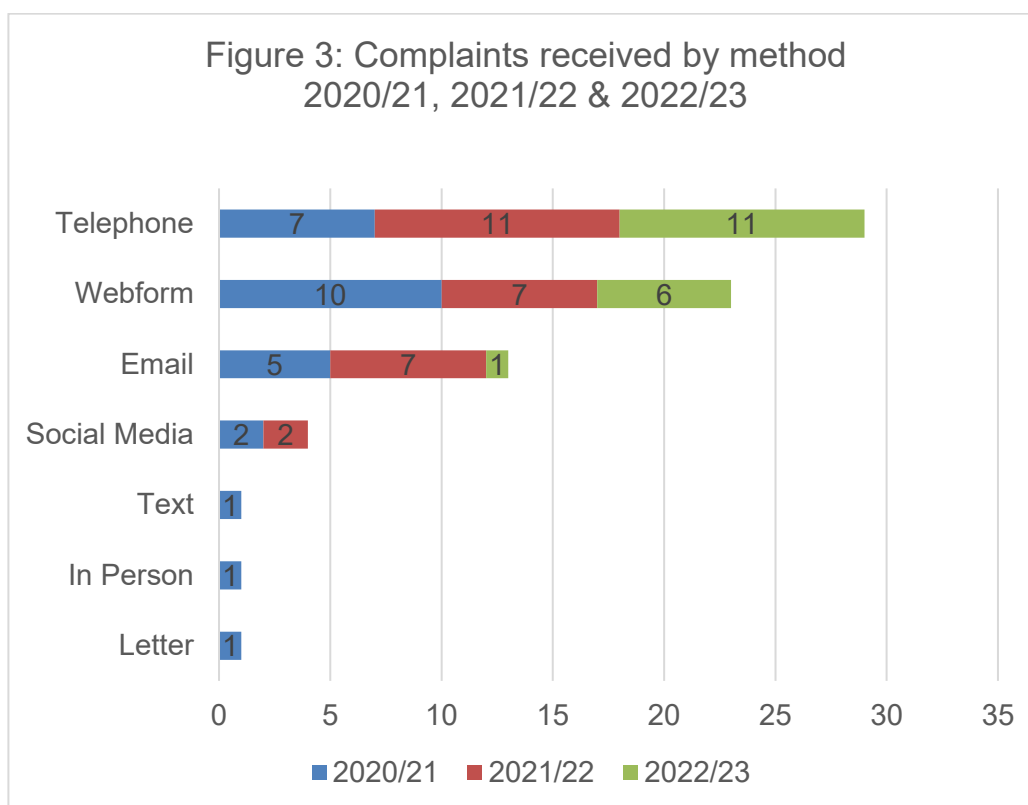
- 3.3 Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of all compliments received within 2022/23; all staff referenced within compliments are notified of the contact along with their line manager, and the document is displayed on the intranet for staff to review. An overview of compliment figures continues to be reported to the Corporate Governance Board on a quarterly basis. The main topics of compliments received are around on duty conduct, emergency response, partner agency feedback and prevention activities.
- 3.4 The Service categorises complaints as *'an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action by one or more members of the public. This may be about the standard of our service provided by us or on our behalf, or the manner in which it was provided'*.
- 3.5 There are four stages at which a complaint may be resolved:
- 3.5.1 Internally a complaint can be resolved by:
- Frontline resolution
 - Formal investigation
 - Appeal to the Chief Fire Officer
- 3.5.2 Complaints can be resolved externally by contacting the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)
- 3.6 20 complaints were received throughout 2022/23; two complaints were received which were later identified to be members of staff from other Fire and Rescue Services. Initial inquiries by the investigating officer confirmed the complaints in relation to off duty conduct and discourteous driving were in relation to other services, and therefore did not follow our complaints procedure and were not investigated.
- 3.7 An informal complaint was received regarding a social media post, which has been excluded from this report as it was resolved outside of the complaints procedure. Remedial action was taken however an investigation was not required.
- 3.8 Of the 18 complaints that were investigated by TWFRS, 13 were not upheld, 2 were upheld and 3 were partly upheld. The two complaints that were upheld were in relation to discourteous driving and smoke alarms; as a result of both complaints action was taken using internal processes to ensure this matter does not occur again. Of the 13 complaints that were not upheld, six were in relation to on duty conduct. All complaints were subject to a thorough investigation carried out by an impartial member of staff who reviews the details of the complaint, conducts interviews where required, and collates all available information to come to a decision.
- 3.9 Following the release of an ITN news article relating to culture in TWFRS on 23 March 2023, the Service received contacts from members of the public using our email systems and the complaints webform. Although the contacts were not specifically contacts that required investigation, the Service felt it appropriate to record and respond in line with our policy. Some of the contacts were vexatious in nature, and offensive and threatening to staff. This is not tolerated by TWFRS, and a response was provided to outline the position around this type of contact.

4. Volume of Complaints received



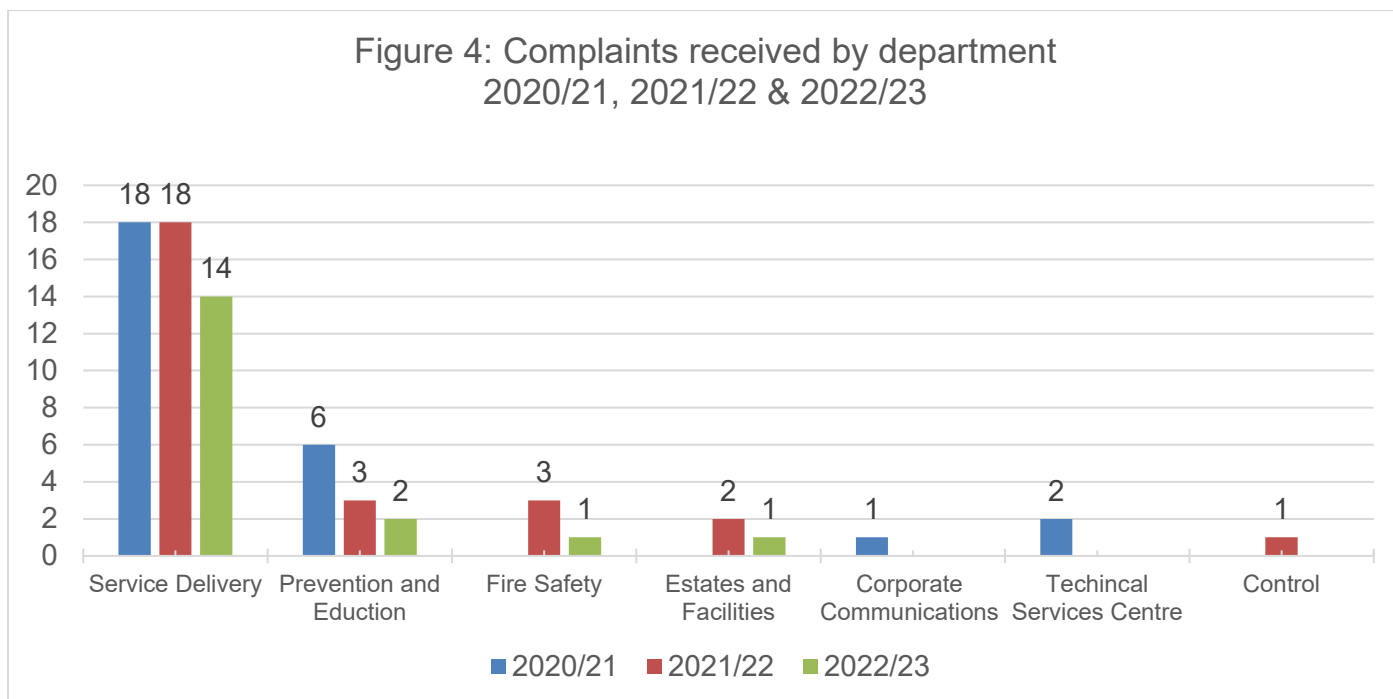
- 4.1 Figure 2 illustrates the number of complaints received by month for the last three financial years. A decrease in complaints has been noted in 2022/23 with 18 reported and investigated, which is decrease on the previous three reporting years (2020/21 27) (2021/22 27).
- 4.2 From October 2022 to March 2023 there were a consistent number of complaints received on a monthly basis, with one received per month. In September 2022 the Service received its highest number of complaints for the year, with four received in a single month; the category of the complaints provide no possible trend, with two in relation to on duty conduct of different nature, personal social media post, and discourteous driving.
- 4.3 The final stage of the Service’s Complaints process, the appeal stage, was invoked once during 2022/2023. The complaint was thoroughly investigated following our process, however it remains under review.

5. Complaints by method of contact



5.1 Figure 3 illustrates that during 2022/23 the preferred method of contact for reporting a complaint was the telephone (11), followed by the webform (6), and email (1). Although the introduction of the webform has provided an alternative method for contact, telephone complaints remain the preferred method of contact; complaints reported using this method have been received from a range of recipients including Control, Business Services and Station Managers. All those that may receive a complaint using any of the above methods are aware of the process for reporting it appropriately to the Compliments and Complaints mailbox.

6. Complaints received by department



- 6.1 Figure 5 shows complaints by department, with the highest number of complaints received relating to Service Delivery. As Service Delivery departments have the most face to face contact with members of the public, it is reasonable to expect that there would be the highest proportion of complaints for this department. Service Delivery staff attended 18,725 incidents during 2022/23, this equates to a percentage of 0.007% complaints received in line with interactions with the public.
- 6.2 The second highest number of departmental complaints received were in relation to the Prevention and Education team, specifically relating to delays within the team and a Safe and Well visit. Similarly to Service Delivery, Prevention and Education are primarily public facing department, who conducted 22,569 Safe and Well visits in 2022/23, therefore it is reasonable to expect a higher proportion of complaints.

7. Complaints causes and outcomes

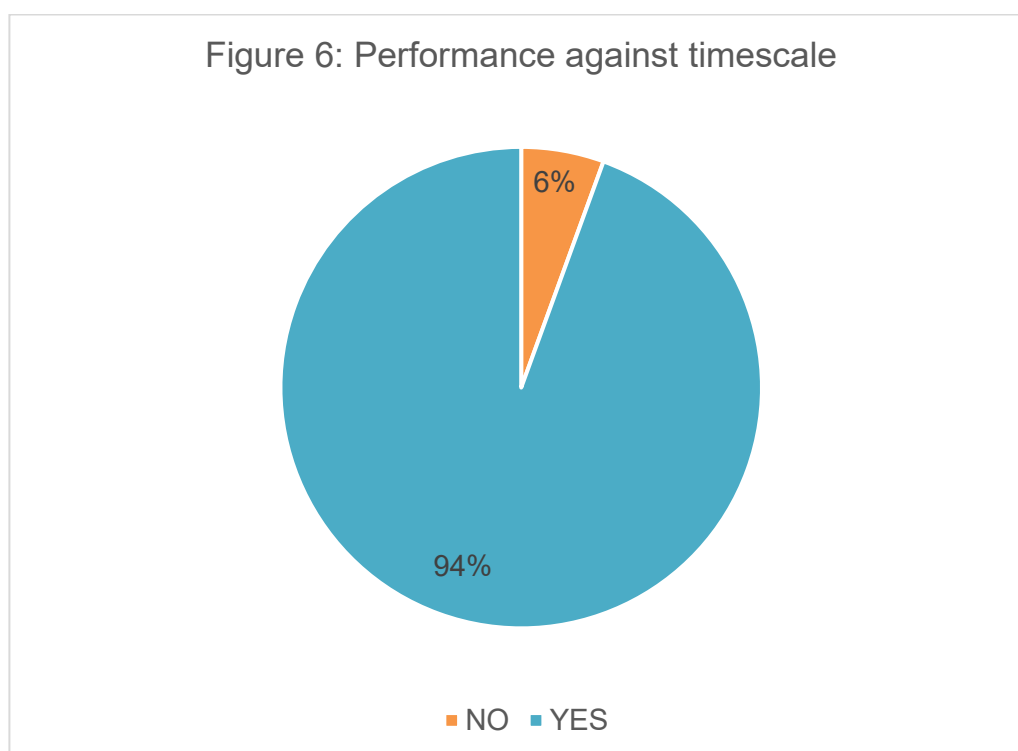
- 7.1 During 2022/23, 10 complaint categories were identified and are listed below. Eight of the complaints received in the 'On Duty Conduct' category were regarding Service Delivery staff, which formed 44% of complaints. Six of these complaints were not upheld, and two were partly upheld.
- 7.2 Four driving related complaints were received in relation to 'Discourteous driving' and 'Inconsiderate parking'. All those that were the subject of a driving complaint have undergone the suitable level of driver training; one complaint was upheld in relation to discourteous driving, and was dealt with using our internal processes.

Complaint Category	Total
Total	18
On duty conduct	8
Discourteous driving	3
Communication / fire report request	1
Inconsiderate parking / neighbour dispute	1
Off duty conduct	1
Off duty conduct / neighbour dispute	1
Operational Decision	1
Smoke Alarms	1
Social media personal	1

7.3 Trend analysis is difficult due to the low volume of complaints received, and varying nature of the complaints, however any remedial action required has been overseen at department level.

7.4 A complaint attributed to our Prevention and Education department has resulted in recommendations implemented in relation to our systems of recording referrals to district teams. This was identified as a result of a complaint recorded by a service user, and during the investigation it became apparent improved guidance and recording could improve this service and avoid future errors.

8. Complaints performance against timescales



- 8.1 The Service aims to acknowledge all complaints within seven days of receipt, providing details of an investigating officer and confirming the next steps in the process with the complainant. The Service met this target on all complaints received within 2022/2023.
- 8.2 The procedure provides a 28 day timescale to fully investigate a complaint and provide a full written response with an outcome. During 2022/23 there was one instance whereby the investigation period was extended past the 28 day timescale; the extension was required as the intervention of the Occupational Health department was required, which was not possible in the timescales initially set. The complainant received a full justification of the extension in writing.
- 8.3 A complaint regarding a broken door was fully investigated and responded to within the 28 day deadline, however following an appeal remains under investigation and has now progressed to a claim. As the original investigation timescale was met this data has not been included within this analysis.

9. Developments in 2022/23

- 9.1 TWFRS is committed to providing the highest standard of service and utilising feedback from compliments and complaints to share best practice, learn lessons and continually improve. Reviewing trends and issues highlighted via our compliments and complaints data and processes is a key tool to support this.
- 9.2 The updated Compliments and Complaints policy and procedure was launched and implemented in March 2022, and has now been embedded across the Service. The Compliments and Complaints intranet page has been developed to provide transparency to staff around the number of complaints and compliments received, with the detail of compliments made readily available for review. The policies and procedures are available on the intranet for staff to access should they require guidance.
- 9.3 The external website now has a function on the homepage for members of the public to register a complaint or compliment; of the 18 complaints logged in 2022/23 six were registered using the method on the external webpage (33%), indicating this method of contact is relatively easy to locate and user friendly for external customers.
- 9.4 Effective Complaint Handling training sessions continued throughout 2022/23, with 20 members of staff undertaking the training in 2022/23

72 members of staff have completed the training in total since May 2021, including the Executive Leadership Team.

The training covers:

- Defining and analysing complaints
- Planning investigations
- Evaluating information and making sound decisions
- Communicating decisions effectively
- Resolving and learning from complaints

This training continues to be provided by the LGO, and the Service will continue to offer this course to all middle managers and above

9.5 Assurance that recommendations are communicated to the appropriate responsible leader(s) following complaint investigations and that improvements or remedial action is fully implemented is a key focus of the ongoing development of our complaints process. Ensuring this communication process is robust will support the provision of transparency and clarity to staff and the public.