



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Overview and Audit Committee Meeting - 10 November 2021

Report title: 2020/21 Compliments, Concerns and Complaints

Lead Member: Councillor Steven Lambert

Report sponsor: Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance

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Action: Noting

Recommendations: That the report be noted.

Executive summary:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Compare concerns, complaints and compliments data across the three years 2018/19; 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- Advise of any corrective action taken to reduce or remove problems that led to a complaint being made.
- Identify opportunities to improve public perception of the services Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service provides.

It includes details of the complaints that were upheld, corrective action taken to reduce or remove the problem and improve public satisfaction with the services we provide.

Financial implications: Whilst there are costs associated with investigating complaints, the cost associated with corrective action continues to be small as issues of liability are thoroughly investigated and, if appropriate, referred to the Authority's insurance. Reserves are held in the event of a serious incident occurring.

Risk management: The public are encouraged to report concerns or complaints and, if required, are given assistance to do so. Processes are in place to ensure that concerns and complaints are rigorously investigated, resolved as quickly as possible and, wherever possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant.

During the complaint investigation personal data is retained to enable the investigating officer to keep in contact with the complainant and, in discussion with the Data Protection Officer (DPO), to consider if a Data Protection Impact Assessment is necessary to ensure that no aspect of the investigations is privacy

intrusive. When the investigation is complete and sufficient time has passed to confirm no further action is required, all personal data is removed, and the anonymised data is retained to consider any patterns of risk. If a complaint is upheld and actions to prevent a similar incident occurring cannot be put in place immediately, the need for a risk treatment will be recorded in a project or department risk register and may be escalated to the corporate risk register. These risk registers are reviewed frequently.

Legal implications: Under section 25 of the Local Government Act 1974 the Authority is subject to the jurisdiction of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO).

The LG&SCO has the power to investigate complaints where there has been:

- Maladministration causing injustice;
- A failure to provide a service that it was the public body's function to provide;
- There was a total failure to provide such a service.

Complaints will not be investigated by the LG&SCO until a complainant has exhausted a local authority's internal complaints procedure

Privacy and security implications: Responses to the survey are anonymised so no privacy risks or issues are raised.

Duty to collaborate: The Policing and Crime Act 2017 requires the Authority to keep opportunities for collaboration with the police and ambulance services under review. Complaints could arise from any of a number of business projects, processes or procedures. Many of these have been developed in collaboration with other fire and rescue services or other partner agencies. During development and through to implementation, these are risk and impact assessed to reduce incidents that may lead to complaints arising. The LG&SCO can treat the actions of third parties as if they were actions of the Authority, where any such third party arrangements exist (Local Government Act 1974, section 25(6) to 25(8)). This means the Authority keep responsibility for third party actions, including complaint handling, no matter what the arrangements are with that party.

Health and safety implications: Any actual or potential health and safety implications are considered during the investigation of a complaint.

Environmental implications: There is neutral effect from the recommendations.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications: Any actual or potential equality, diversity, and inclusion implications are considered during the investigation of a complaint.

The survey is structured to enable user experiences to be stratified and compared across a range of protected characteristics including ethnicity, gender, age and long-standing limiting illness / disability.

Consultation and communication: Monitoring of user experiences of our emergency services performance and the reporting of findings contributes to the identification of potential opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our core emergency response, prevention and protection processes.

In line with the LG&SCO Guidance, '[Effective Complaint Handling for Local Authorities](#)' (revised and published 8 October 2020), this report is submitted annually to this committee and available to the public in the interests of openness and transparency.

Background papers: The last report was made to the Overview and Audit Committee on 22 July 2020: <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/07/item-16-2019-20-compliments-concerns-and-complaints.pdf/>

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Compliments, Concerns and Complaints received 2018/19 – 2020/21	None

Item 13 - Appendix 1

Compliments, Concerns and Complaints received 2018/19 – 2020/21

1. Purpose

This purpose of this report is to:

- compare concerns, complaints and compliments data across the three years 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- advise of any corrective action taken to reduce or remove problems that led to a complaint being made.
- identify opportunities to improve public satisfaction with the services the Authority provides.

It includes details of the complaints that were upheld, corrective action taken to reduce or remove the problem and improve public satisfaction with the services we provide.

2. Scope

As the numbers of concerns, complaints and compliments received directly from the public is relatively low, data from the annual satisfaction survey 'After the Incident' is also included, to capture the perceptions of those experiencing an incident in the home or in non-domestic premises.

3. Concerns and complaints

There were no complaints arising from an information security incident and no complaints were investigated by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) or the Information Commissioner, during this reporting period.

2018/2019 16 concerns/complaints were received, six of which were upheld:

- During training dirty water from a hose was sprayed onto a neighbour's window. – *Crews were advised to be cautious in considering wind direction when using water hoses in exercises.*
- Someone walked on a freshly painted fire hydrant and got paint on their shoes. - *This is an ongoing problem where it is unsafe to put anything around the painted area and, in most instances, the paint has dried before the technician has left.*
- The report of an incident, on the "latest incidents" on the website, was considered inaccurate. – *The householders felt that the incident was misreported and a correction was made.*
- An Authority driver pulled out into the path of a car. – *The driver was distracted and admitted liability. The driver was referred for refresher training.*
- The reporting of an arson finding with regard to a vehicle fire was delayed. – *The incident commander did not notify the change in incident cause. As a consequence, Thames Valley Police did not allocate a crime number immediately. The procedures have been reviewed to ensure that the correct actions are taken as soon as possible.*

Item 13 - Appendix 1

- The message explaining that the switchboard was closed over Christmas did not function. – *The message had been checked and was thought to be working. Additional checks will be made in future.*

2019/2020 There were 17, concerns/complaints five of which were upheld:

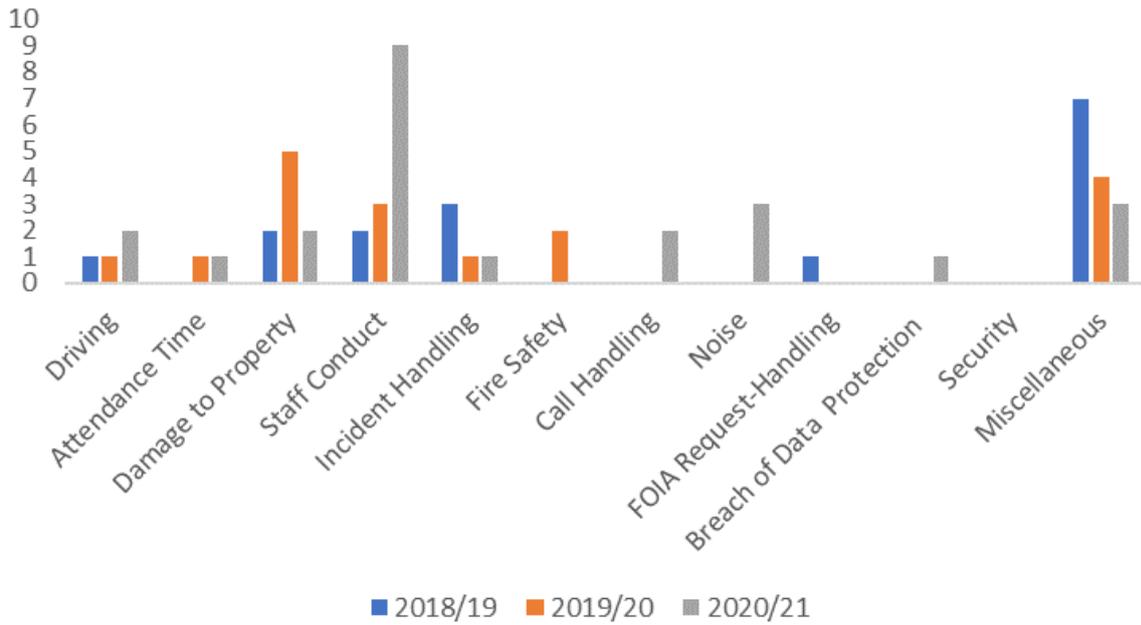
- Inappropriate use of social media which could be seen as bringing the Authority into disrepute. – *All employees reminded that social media cannot be used to present personal views whilst representing the Authority.*
- An Authority employee driving a badged vehicle was seen speaking on a mobile phone whilst driving. – *This was referred as a disciplinary investigation.*
- An officer failed to attend an appointment for a fire and wellness visit – *Officer fell sick and we were unable to make contact to advise the resident and reschedule the appointment.*
- A complainant stated that a uniformed firefighter approached him at his place of work and threatened him. – *This was found to be a family dispute. However, as the firefighter was in uniform, this was referred as a disciplinary investigation.*
- Following a visit by our contractors coming to collect scrapped vehicles, it was found that batteries had been put in the wrong place resulting in “sparking” which could have resulted in a fire. – *The procedure had changed under a new contract and the extant procedural document did not reflect this. This procedure has since been rewritten.*

2020/2021 There were 24, concerns/complaints five of which were upheld:

- Damage to a neighbouring property driveway by a fire appliance following a house fire – *cost of repair of damage paid under a settlement agreement.*
- Complaint from neighbour regarding training at a Fire Station on a Sunday – *training continued, but every effort was made to keep the noise to a minimum.*
- A member of the public was not happy with the way a member of staff spoke to them when ringing regarding smoke detectors – *a letter of apology was sent explaining the situation.*
- Damage to car when taking action to avoid a fire appliance on blue lights – *Insurance claim.*
- A vehicle accident involving a fire appliance – *Insurance claim.*

Item 13 - Appendix 1

Complaints 2018/19 - 2020/21



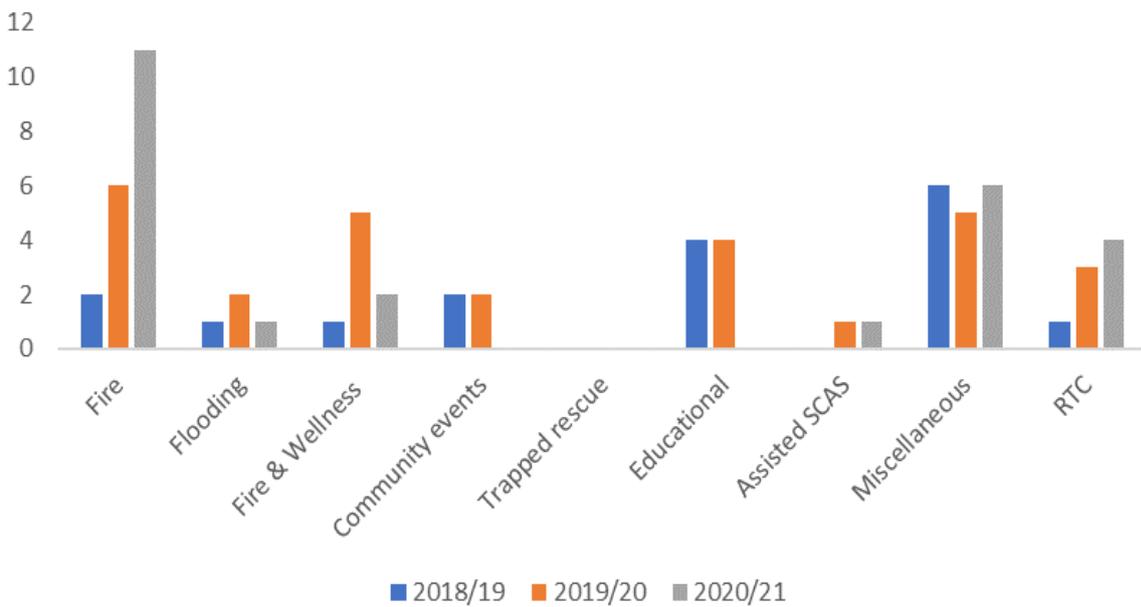
4. Compliments

2018/2019 - 17 compliments

2019/2020 - 28 compliments

2020/2021 - 25 compliments

Compliments 2018/19 - 2020/21



Item 13 - Appendix 1

5. After the incident - Customer satisfaction survey 2018/19 - 2020/21

The Authority continues to subscribe to the annual confidential survey which measures the satisfaction of members of the public who have experienced an incident in the home or in a non-domestic dwelling. The questionnaires are returned to an independent social research practice¹ who analyse the returns and publish the results annually.

The survey runs from 1 April to 31 March each year and the report compares Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services' (BFRS) performance with previous years and other fire and rescue services (FRS) participating in this national survey. The surveys capture respondent perceptions of FRS performance across the following areas:

- The incident;
- Initial contact with the FRS;
- At the scene;
- Information and advice;
- Overall service;
- Previous experience;

Respondents are also invited to make an overall assessment of satisfaction with the service provided.

These surveys are a good indication of how well the community is served when an incident occurs, and a useful supplement to the compliments, concerns and complaints, received from other sources, to provide a broader range of feedback.

Table 1 Domestic incidents 2018/19 – 2020/21

Domestic	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Respondents	51	140	207
Very Satisfied	92%	97%	94%
Fairly Satisfied	6%	2%	4%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	2%	1%	2%
Total:	98%	100%	98%

The list below are some of the comments submitted by people completing the survey of incidents in the home:

- Call out was very fast.
- Calm, friendly and reassuring manner.
- Caring, cheerful, excellent.

¹ <https://www.ors.org.uk/>

Item 13 - Appendix 1

- Friendly, courteous and determined to finish the job. Very impressed.
- Didn't make me feel stupid for calling them.
- Gave me confidence.
- Kind and helpful, reassuring that it was alright to call them out.
- Kept us informed.
- Reassuring, helpful, kind and polite.
- Surpassed the level of service I expected.

Table 2 Non-domestic incidents 2018/19 – 2020/21

Non-Domestic	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Respondents	61	128	106
Very Satisfied	90%	91%	94%
Fairly Satisfied	10%	9%	5%
Very Dissatisfied	0%	0%	1%
Total:	100%	99%	99%

The list below are some of the comments submitted by people completing the survey of incidents in non-domestic properties:

- Arrived very promptly.
- Excellent, polite service and communicated actions very well. Very reassuring and professional manner.
- Rapid attendance, sound advice and patient.
- Their knowledge of the building helped.
- They acted quickly and avoided damage to my property where they could.
- They were effective, polite, and professional at all times.
- Very polite and reassuring.
- Excellent response and service throughout. Thank you.
- Fast polite, professional and friendly.
- Rapid attendance, sound advice and patience.

Overview of Key Findings:

- Overall user satisfaction with the emergency service received from BFRS has remained fairly consistent over time, ranging between 95% and 100% for the domestic survey and 94% and 100% for the non-domestic survey over a ten-year period.
- A higher level of response to the Domestic survey was received in 2020/21 compared with the previous year (207 v 140). Overall satisfaction levels remained high although there was a fall-off in the very satisfied category (94% v 97%).

Item 13 - Appendix 1

- A lower level of response to the Non-Domestic survey was received in 2020/21 compared with the previous year (106 v 128). However, there was an improvement in very satisfied levels (94% v 91%).
- Benchmarking – not enough FRS took part in the survey for a benchmarking report to be produced for 2020/21.
- During the year a new online questionnaire facility was piloted alongside the traditional postal response service. However, take up for this new response facility was low with only 6 domestic and 7 non-domestic responses.