



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Overview and Audit Committee, 9 November 2022

Report title: 2021/22 Compliments, Concerns and Complaints

Lead Member: Councillor Gary Hall

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 2019/20; 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 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 provider. 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. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed 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 After the incident survey (ATI) 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 several 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 and reported in line with current procedures.

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 ATI 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 recommendations in 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 10 November 2021: <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 2020/21 – 2021/22	None

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Compliments, Concerns and Complaints received 2019/20 – 2021/22

1. Purpose

This purpose of this report is to:

- compare compliments, concerns, and complaints data across the three years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 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 compliments, concerns and complaints received directly from the public is low, data from the annual service-user 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.

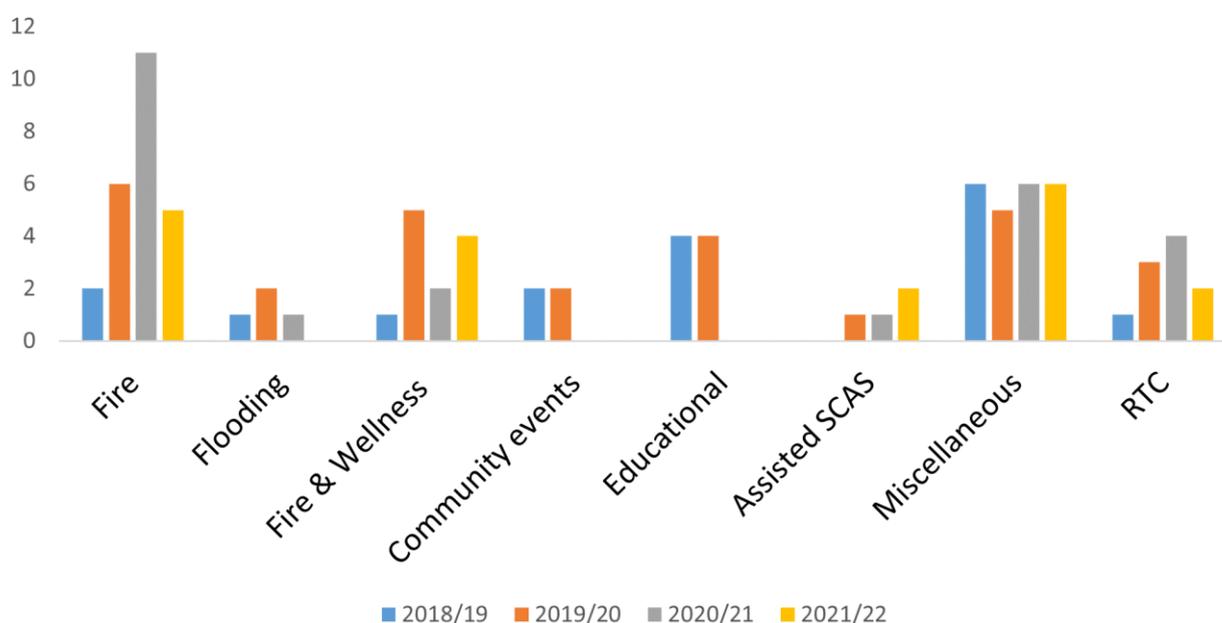
3. Compliments

2019/2020 - 28 compliments

2020/2021 - 25 compliments

2021/2022 - 19 compliments

Compliments 2018/19 - 2020/21



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4. 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.

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:

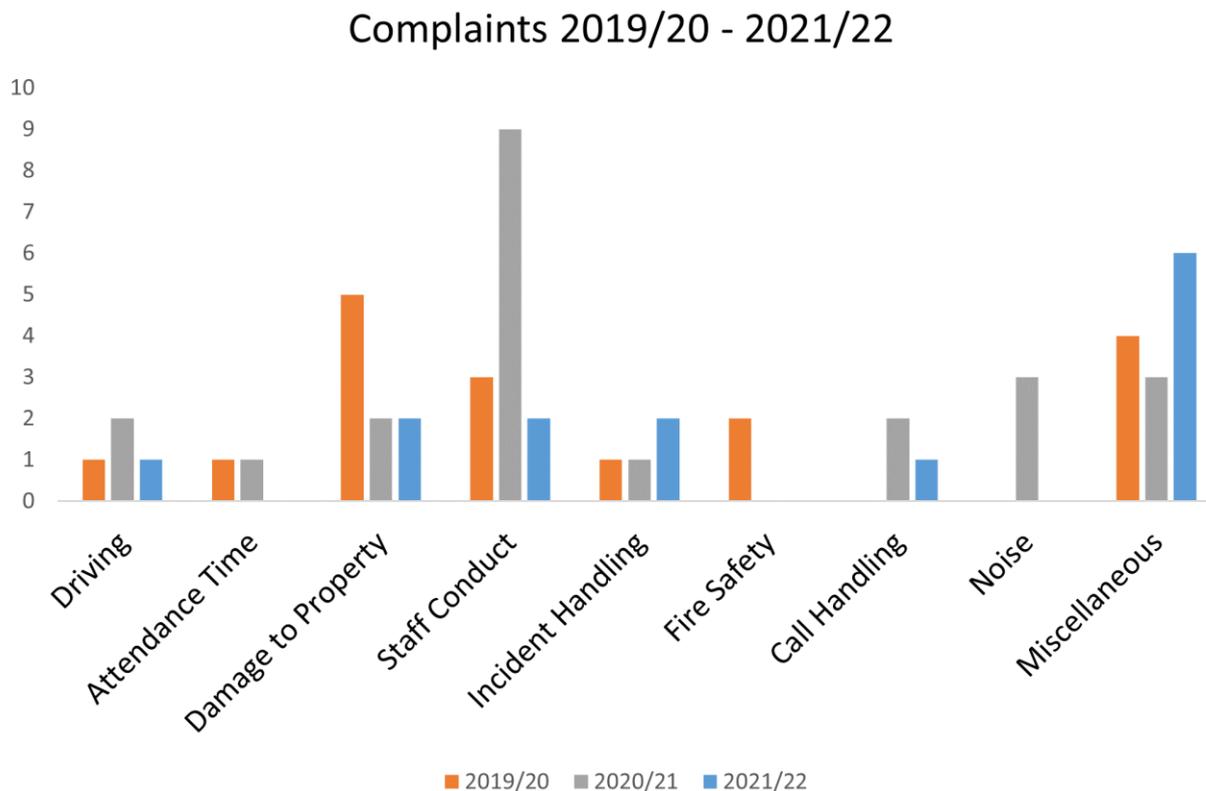
- Damage to a neighbouring property driveway by a fire appliance following a house fire – *cost of repair of damage paid under a settlement agreement.*
- Complaint from neighbour regarding training at a Fire Station on a Sunday – *training continued, but every effort was made to keep the noise to a minimum.*
- 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.*

2021/2022 There were 14 concerns/complaints 2 of which were upheld:

- Smoke entered neighbouring property whilst training within an empty property – *Crews to notify neighbours of use of smoke during training exercises in empty properties.*
- Catering food rubbish from large scale exercise was placed in business recycling bin without permission. As a result refuse providers refused collection

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- Ensure all rubbish from future large-scale exercises is disposed of in the correct manner.



5. After the incident - Customer satisfaction survey 2019/20 - 2021/22

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.

¹ <https://www.ors.org.uk/>

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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 2019/20 – 2021/22

Domestic	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Respondents	140	207	144*
Very Satisfied	97%	94%	94%
Fairly Satisfied	2%	4%	3%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	1%	2%	1%
Fairly dissatisfied	0	0	1%
Total Satisfied:	99%	98%	97%

*15 of which were completed online.

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

- Arrival was very efficient as a baby was locked in the home alone.
- Arrived promptly, were very calm and reassuring as I had never called FRS before.
- Communication and reassuring us all especially with 7 children, 4 of which are disabled and a 3-month-old.
- Communication and speed of response.
- Exemplary. Given the hour (3am) and a false alarm, I appreciated that disturbance was kept to the minimum.
- Firefighters were professional and non-judgemental.
- I am 89 and they made sure I was safe and reassured me until my son arrived.
- Put a new smoke alarm in.
- The team kept us informed. Were very polite and professional. Feel incredibly lucky to have these people looking after us.

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Table 2 Non-domestic incidents 2019/20 – 2021/22

Non-Domestic	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Respondents	128	106	72
Very Satisfied	91%	94%	92%
Fairly Satisfied	9%	5%	7%
Very Dissatisfied	0%	1%	1%
Total:	100%	99%	99%

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

- All very professional and efficient. Unlike the gas engineer who caused the false alarm!
- Although turned out to be a false alarm, were very thorough in checking the building to make sure it was ok to bring the team back inside.
- Inspecting officer followed up with a drop in call.
- Quickly installed large fans to disperse the smoke quickly. Excellent communication from the officer in charge.
- The fire was when the premises were empty. A bin was smouldering to the extent the fire alarm went off. The FRS took the bin outside to extinguish it, rather than damage the property inside for which we are grateful.
- When asked what was going on the FRS was extremely helpful to talk to the pupils and reassure them that all was ok. It was nice to see the FRS on site had time to talk to some of the pupils, many thanks for all your help.

Overview of Key Findings

- Overall user satisfaction with the emergency service received from BFRS has remained consistent over time, ranging between 95% and 100% for the domestic survey and 96% and 100% for the non-domestic survey over a ten-year period.
- A lower level of response to the Domestic survey was received in 2021/22 compared with the previous year (144 v 207). Overall satisfaction levels remained high.
- A lower level of response to the non-Domestic survey was received in 2021/22 compared with the previous year (72 v 106). Also, there was a fall-off in the very satisfied category (92% v 94%).
- Benchmarking – not enough FRS' took part in the survey for a benchmarking report to be produced for 2021/22.