

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Service**



Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/2024

Date Produced: 8 May 2024



1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of the compliments and complaints received by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (hereby referred to as 'the Service') between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

1.2 During this period, 71,551 'official' interactions were recorded which comprised of 31,150¹ emergency calls being received by the Control Room; 16,827² incidents were attended; and 20,762³ Safe and Well Checks and 2,812⁴ fire safety activities⁵ were conducted. When compared with 2022/2023, the Service saw an increase in the number of compliments (12) and complaints (20) received. Even with a slight increase this year when compared with the number of official interactions, both figures are low. The 170 compliments equate to 0.24% of the official interactions and the 38 complaints equate to 0.05%.

1.3 The compliments and complaints received were from the public, service users, partners or other stakeholders. Overall, the correspondence was generally appreciative of the Service, even some complaints and the compliments acknowledged the positive impact employees had made on them and the exceptional service provided.

1.4 In summary during 2023/2024:

- 170 compliments were received, an 8% increase on the previous year. Further details of Service compliments are presented in section 6 of this report.
- 41 complaints were received however, only 38 were analysed as two complainants withdrew their complaints and another complaint had been sent to the Service in error. The complainant was directed to the correct fire and rescue service.
- The 38 complaints received were more than double the 2022/2023 figure of 18 and 11 more than the 27 complaints received during 2021/2022.
- 17 of the 38 (45%) complaints were fully or partly upheld following investigation. Further complaint analysis is detailed in sections 7 to 11 of this report.
- One complaint was referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO), closed after initial enquiries, and classified as being 'out of jurisdiction'.
- 31 of the 38 (82%) complaint investigations were completed within 28 days. Section 11 offers further detail about performance against timescale.
- 48 employees participated in the 'Effective Compliant Handling' training with the LGO. Further details about this training and other developments are located in section 12.

1.5 The Service remains committed to providing the highest quality of service to the communities of Tyne and Wear and appreciates the feedback it receives from the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders is critical to understanding its performance. Feedback may describe activities undertaken to an exceptional standard and enables employees to be recognised for their efforts or identify areas for improvement.

¹ Source: Mobilising system for calls, 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024.

² Source: Incident Recording System, 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024.

³ Source: CFRMIS for Safe and Well data 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024.

⁴ Source: CFRMIS for fire safety activities, 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024.

⁵ Fire safety activities include fire safety audits, desk based activity, explosive inspections, petroleum visits and inspections and follow up alterations and prohibition notices.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 During 2023/2024, feedback from the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders was received through a variety of methods including verbally, in person or by telephone, and in writing by card, letter, email, social media or via the Service's website.
- 2.2 As shown in Table 1, 253 forms of correspondence were received⁶, which comprised of 170 compliments, 41 complaints and 42 other contacts representing a 22% increase in communication received when compared with the 2022/2023 figure of 207.
- 2.3 As per the policy, the two withdrawn complaints were reviewed by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) to decide whether the issue(s) of concern (on duty conduct and a communication matter) required further consideration. A Station Manager reviewed each and where appropriate local action was taken. The concerns have not been included in the analysis, as they did not require formal investigation and no outcomes were attributed.

Table 1: Correspondence received during 2023/2024

Correspondence	Count
Compliments	170
Complaints	41
TWFRS	38
TWFRS – withdrawn (August and November 2023)	2
Other FRS – redirected	1
Contacts	42
Home safety check/smoke alarm replacement	10
Fire Safety concern	6
News story about the Service's culture	5
Low Traffic Neighbourhood Scheme (LTNS)	4
Emergency vehicle access queries	3
Employment matters ⁷	3
Social media queries	3
Claim – vehicle/property	2
Donation offer of equipment/furniture	2
Miscellaneous	2
Hebburn Tri-Station	1
Data request	1
Total	253

- 2.4 As the subject of each compliment and complainant varied and involved a range of employees and departments there is, no evidence to indicate why there had been an increase in submissions. Internally work has been conducted to increase awareness of compliment and complaint reporting so this may have contributed to the increase in numbers with more employees reporting compliments and better signposting undertaken by employees with the public on how to report a complaint or compliment.
- 2.5 Further, as part of the LGO training, the facilitator explained they had viewed the Service's website and commented on how easy it was to report a compliment or complaint. This is speculative only however this may have contributed to the increase in submissions and the acceptance of complaints through various channels including the Control Room which operates 24/7, making the reporting a compliment or complaint more user-friendly.

⁶ Received directly by or forwarded internally to the compliments and complaints mailbox.

⁷ Includes applications, grievances, pensions and employer liability claims.

- 2.6 Correspondence received to the compliments and complaints mailbox that was neither a compliment nor a complaint was categorised as a contact. On receipt, each contact was reviewed and directed to the relevant department for their action. The Service responded to all contacts received.
- 2.7 As shown in Table 1, 42 contacts were received, a 68% increase on the 2022/2023 figure of 25. On review of the data, the increase in the number of contacts during the year can be attributed to the following: five of the 10 home safety check/alarms replacement contacts were received by another fire and rescue service and redirected to the Service. Following the media coverage about the Service's culture, five emails were received, with each responded to by the DCFO. During a Council consultation about a Low Traffic Neighbourhood Scheme, four residents wrote to the Service about this matter and a further three residents wrote about emergency vehicle access in their street. These 17 forms of correspondence contributed to the increase in the contacts received for 2023/2024.

3. Accountability for compliments and complaints management

- 3.1 The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority is the public body that holds the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO) to account for performance on behalf of the communities of Tyne and Wear.
- 3.2 The CFO delegates responsibility for the management of compliments and complaints to the DCFO or in their absence a nominated deputy.
- 3.3 The Executive Services Manager, supported by the Governance Advisor and Executive Services Team, are responsible for the day-to-day management of complaints.

4. Compliment and complaint management

- 4.1 Where contact details are provided, compliments are acknowledged by the recipient and shared internally for recording and monitoring purposes.
- 4.2 The Service operates a two-stage complaints process. Stage 1 complaints are dealt with either as a frontline resolution, for simple issues, requiring little or no investigation, or via a formal investigation process where either the complainant is dissatisfied with the frontline resolution response or it is clear from the outset that the complaint requires investigation. During 2023/2024, 35/38 complaints (92%) were formally investigated.
- 4.3 Stage 2 is the appeal stage where should the complainant feel that no satisfactory resolution has been achieved under Stage 1; then they have the right to appeal the decision to the CFO stating the grounds for their appeal and the CFO may choose to:
- Pass the complaint and any Stage 1 paperwork to the DCFO/Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) who will review the investigation evidence or;
 - Appoint an independent officer to carry out a secondary investigation.
- 4.4 During 2023/2024, one appeal was reviewed by the CFO and not upheld.
- 4.5 On conclusion of the Stage 2 review or secondary investigation, the complainant will be notified in writing of the outcome. This stage concludes the Service's complaint process. If the complainant remains unsatisfied, they can raise their complaint externally with the LGO who may investigate the complaint. This is the final stage of the complaint's journey.

4.6 One complaint was referred to the LGO by a complainant in February 2024 and the complainant was advised by the LGO that they would not consider the complaint because it related to an employment/personnel matter and such matters are excluded from their jurisdiction under schedule 5/5A paragraph 4 of the Local Government Act 1974. The LGO confirmed that the matter was categorised as ‘closed after initial enquiries - out of jurisdiction’.

5. Compliment and complaint reporting

5.1 Compliment and complaint information is published monthly on the Service’s intranet and reported quarterly to the Internal Governance Board.

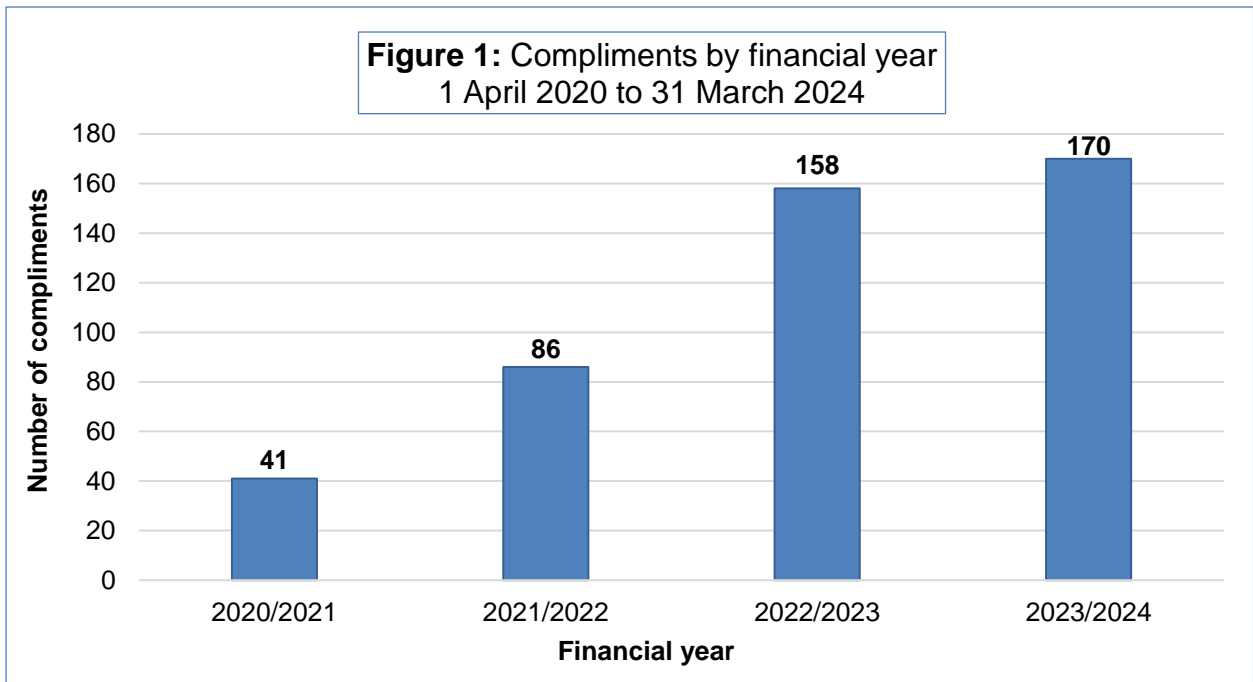
5.2 Publicising this information contributes to the promotion of good standards of conduct, as positive recognition reinforces the behaviour that led to the reward, which in turn creates a positive feedback loop. Equally, highlighting the causes and outcomes of complaints also helps to prevent future complaints of a similar nature from reoccurring.

5.3 This report will be received by the Internal Governance Board, Executive Leadership Team and the Governance Committee and will be published in the public domain.

6. Compliment analysis

6.1 The compliments analysed within this report are received from external sources such as members of the public, service users, partners or other stakeholders. Internal interdepartmental compliments are not included however; any positive feedback received during the year has been directed to the appropriate department.

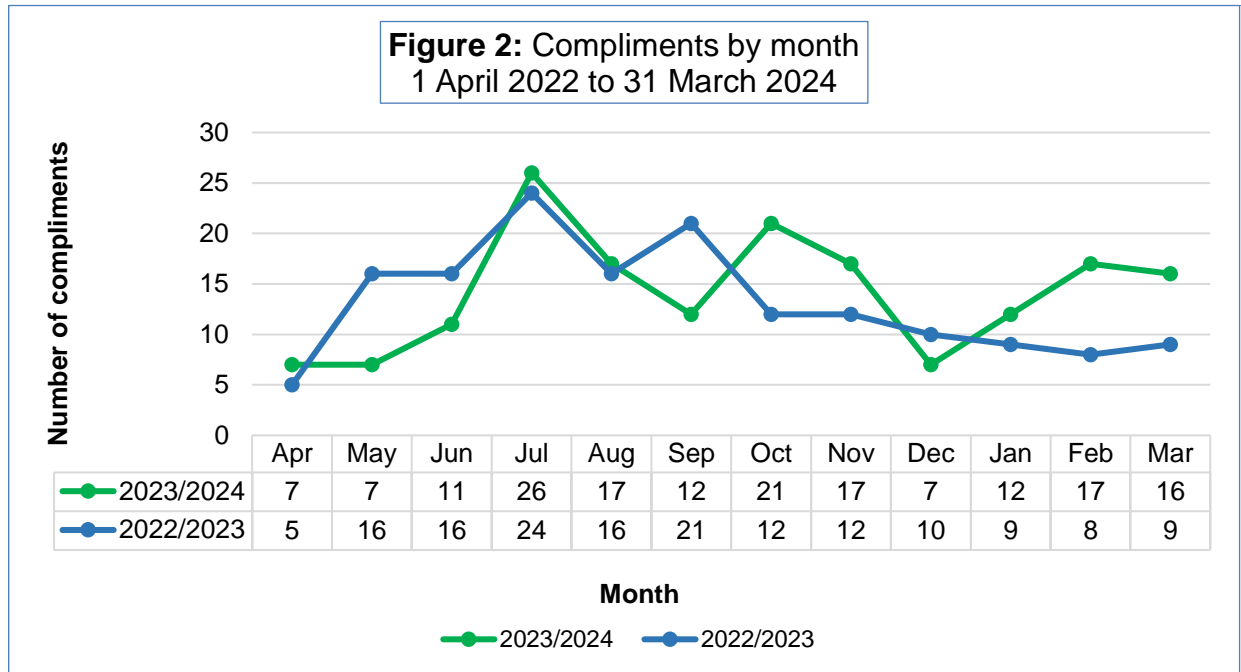
6.2 The Service defines compliments as ‘praise given by a service user or partner for a service provided, or to thank an individual, team or department for their actions’.



6.3 Figure 1 shows the total number of compliments received over the last four financial years. The increase in compliments over this period evidences the work undertaken by the Service to promote the internal sharing of compliments beyond an individual, team or department. The ability to better capture compliments means that they can be recorded

and reported on in reports such as this. The promotion of compliments has been undertaken by internal communications including bulletins and training.

6.4 Figure 2 shows the number of compliments received by month for the last two financial years. These years have been compared as they are similar in total, as 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 were significantly lower it would not be appropriate to compare those years to observe trends because there would be limited comparators.



6.5 The data for both years shows the number of compliments steadily increasing from April onwards, peaking in July, declining slightly and peaking once again in the autumn (September 2022 and October 2023). During 2022/2023, September 2022 onwards saw a decline in the number of compliments received, the same happened in 2023/2024, however rather than plateauing like the previous year, from December 2023 onwards compliments increased, peaking again in February 2024.

6.6 The qualitative data does not identify any specific reasons why the compliments peak in the summer for both years or in February 2024. The content of the compliments relate to various incidents and activities and involve a range of employees and departments. Looking at the data no one activity or incident has ever received more than two compliments therefore there is no evidence to offer a rationale for these trends.

6.7 The number of compliments received in the first two quarters of 2023/2024, was slower when compared with the previous year, the Service received 18 fewer compliments. The decline in the number of 'expected' compliments for quarters 1 and 2 2023/2024 coincides with the increase in the number of complaints received for the same period.

6.8 Although speculative only, the media coverage in March 2023 about the Service's culture and the ongoing wider media coverage about the fire and rescue service culture nationally may have influenced the number of compliments and complaints being submitted. For example, in quarter 1 2023/2024, the Service received 16 complaints which is almost the total number of complaints received for 2022/2023 (18) and in the year prior this was one for the same period.

6.9 As the data demonstrates, it was not until the last two quarters of 2023/2024 that the Service superseded the expected quarterly totals and the annual target of 158. Although

the number of compliments peaked in July 2023, quarters 3 and 4 received 28 more compliments than the same period last year.

6.10 The Service records compliments verbatim and a suffix of “[sic]” (short for ‘*sic erat scriptum*’, ‘thus was it written’) has been used in sections 6.10.1 to 6.10.7 to highlight that the compliments have been written as quoted and include grammatical and spelling errors. Compliments have only been modified to remove personal identifiers or to shorten the text, which is indicated by an ellipsis (three dots) to show where text has been removed text.

6.11 A selection of the 170 compliments received have been included in the report to illustrate the breadth of work the Service and its employees are involved with. Most compliments relate to the Service’s statutory duties as detailed in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and other legislation, regulations and guidance. For the benefit of this report the compliments have been grouped into the following categories:

- Fire safety activities.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Emergency response – firefighting.
- Emergency response – other.
- Partnership working and training.
- Good deeds that have been undertaken by staff on and off duty.

6.11.1 One of the Service’s core functions is to promote fire safety, which involves delivering interventions in the home and the community. Several ‘thank yous’ were received from service users and the public following fire safety advice and interventions:

“I would like to pass on my thanks to Yankee Green Watch who came to give a fire safety talk to the Friday Friends group at [location] last Friday. The talk was great, being practical to the groups needs and very informative, the elderly group members found it really interesting. They have been talking about it again this morning and have commented that it has really made them think about their fire safety and are reassured that they will get visits to check their smoke alarms. Many thanks again for taking the time and having the patience with all the questions.”

“I just wanted to say a big thank you for the program of talks that you delivered this week. The learners really benefitted from your advice around fire safety in the home and everyone learned something new! It can be a challenge to present to some of our groups - particularly the ones with very low levels of language. However, you managed to communicate the key messages clearly and made a great impression on all of our learners. It'd be great to have you back again next year. In the meantime - thank you very much on behalf of the team and I - we are really grateful for your continued support.”

“Just wanted to give you an email regarding Gosforth Fire Station visiting my college on Wednesday. Each and every one...were tremendous with both staff and students! Speaking in a brilliant and calm tone as well as allowing students to express themselves. We really do hugely appreciate their time. Thank you so much from everyone at [name]!”

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"I would like to say a big thank you for the service I got last Friday. I had 3 new smoke alarms fitted. The officer who did the safety check on my home was very informative, give [sic] me some very sound advice which I will take note of. The other officer who fitted the alarms was quick leaving no mess at all. He also removed all the old alarms from the ceiling and took away to dispose of. This is a great service, my ceilings are really high and couldn't reach the alarms myself even with ladders so I really appreciate everything they did to make my home safe again. Many thanks."

"I want to say thank you yous hav also helped me. My local fire team at local station came out assessed my house and needs done an plan on what to do in an fire with me and showed me how to lower my risks of having an fire in My home and fited an more nosy fire larm so I can hear it due to my hearing is bad so thanks if in doubt contact them they could save your life by showing you how to prevent an risk in your home especially if you have an disability." [sic]

"Excellent service today. Called for some advice about my 88 yr old Mam and smoking this morning. Prevention people from Wallsend have been out within two hours, changed smoke alarms, fireproof mat etc. Thank you all so much."

"... I was visited by two officers from your Safe and Well Check team. The officers are based at Swalwell Fire Station. I would like to thank both of them for the way they carried out the survey. It was very professional and informative. My wife and I are both in our late eighties and find the care they showed us was great. Thanks again for the excellent service you all provide in safeguarding the people of the North East."

6.11.2 The compliments in 6.11.1 show interactions with several individuals with protected characteristics⁸ such as the elderly or those with a disability. Feedback about how they were treated evidences the Service's commitment to the Equality Act 2010. Further examples of positive interactions include:

"Just wanted to say thank you...gave my daughter the 5 star treatment and showed her around a fire engine at the south shields fire station. [Name] was out with her carers she has autism, ADHD and is a very anxious little girl. They were walking passed the station. He took the time to show [name] around and the carers commented he was brilliant with her. I would love to share the photos with you because the smile on her face shows it all! Thank you!"

"Want to say a big thank you...I couldn't gain access into my nans's house as she had the key in the door, as she was stuck in her wheelchair as something hot stuck in the wheel and couldn't move with her being wheelchair bound, the crew were amazing!"

⁸ Nine protected characteristics age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

“Hello, I just wanted to say thank you! You visited my grandma in [location] recently to check on her smoke alarms. She told me you stayed for a while (as she is struggling to walk in her hip brace at the moment) to make sure she was okay and not alone. Your firefighters also said they would come back to see how she was in July after her operation. I absolutely cannot thank you enough for making sure people don't fall through the gaps in society.”

“Huge thank you to the crew who attended ‘the special lionesses emergency service day’ the patience and time they had with all the children were amazing, but they were extra special to the children who had special needs, they made my little boys day, and even more so the next day when they came to fit a smoke alarm in my property! [name] would like to be a fire fighter when he grows up. The event was at the air field next to Nissan. It was Washington crew that attended. My daughter is autistic, non verbal and isn't a lover of men. The crew made her feel so comfortable.”

6.11.3 Several of the compliments received were from service users or the public about operational personnel attendance at a house or business property fires. All compliments focused on the prompt response, swift actions and professionalism of the crew in attendance. For example:

“Please accept our thanks for your combined swift response and actions to the confirmed fire at the [name] mortuary on [date]. The actions of the crews on the day undoubtedly minimised the damage and impact on services at a critical part of the day and the hospital infrastructure.”

“I would like to say a big sincere and heartfelt thank you for the amazing professionalism of your fire-fighters last night. I am from [address] and was actually stuck in my flat above the fire. The fire fumes and smoke were too thick in the tower stairwell and your guys gave me great advice to stay on the balcony and wait for them to come up and dissipate the smoke to guide myself and another tenant [name] in [flat number] down to safety. I am incredibly grateful and am really in admiration of their professionalism. No doubt about it without them telling me to rest calm and throw down the key to the door in the stairwell it could have been a close-run thing. They came up the dangerous stairwell and freed us. So once again -thanks a lot and thanks to them staying around so long checking it would not reignite-very reassuring and admirable.”

“There was a fire in one of the houses near me and the fire service were absolute professionals. Special dues to the fire fighter who tried their best to resuscitate a cat which unfortunately didn't make it, they did everything they could. You's are legends and don't get the praise you deserve.” [sic]

“Once again I am so grateful for you literally saving our house. The fire damage internally was mostly smoke damage which we have managed to clear away - there is barely even any water damage in the kitchen which is incredible.”

OFFICIAL

6.11.4 In addition to firefighting, operational personnel attend road traffic collisions, the technical rescue of people and animals and/or respond to life-threatening medical emergencies. The compliments below show some of the ‘thank you’s’ received about these types of incidents:

“... I was involved in a car accident on the team valley, I can't speak highly enough of the fire service and how they conducted themselves at the time.”

“I tried to take my life on the Tyne bridge on the early hours of [date/time]...And the police arrived and so did the fire brigade and ambulance service and out of everyone there was a female fire fighter staff member (I think she was one of 3) who although she was there to talk me down too - she held onto my hands and spoke to me and really struck a chord with me. It meant a world of difference her input about how she was a mam etc and really humanising the situation and support on the bridge in those moments and she managed to get me to come back over the railings. I don't know her name or even if she's aware of the impact the day. But it meant a lot...” [sic]

“The husband of the lady has telephoned to thank the watch who helped and waited until the ambulance arrived last night. The lady has broken her leg (tib and fib) and has also broken her ankle. She is in theatre today. The husband wanted to pass on their thanks and I wished her a speedy recovery on behalf of the watch.”

“I would like them thanked for rescuing my cat out of an engine yesterday. She only had minor injuries. And we are so grateful.”

“Congratulations to the team who successfully handled the rescue this morning of a neighbour from his roof...The access was incredibly tricky. Thank you to all involved.”

“I want to say thank you to you. I tried to commit suicide in March and I was on a high place for a few hours and the fire brigade came and secured me with ropes and helped was scared and not in the right frame of mind and they calmed me down.”

6.11.5 Partnership working with blue light partners and other organisations is an integral part of the Service's work in providing the best service to the communities of Tyne and Wear. The Operational personnel adhere to the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles (JESIP) when dealing with an emergency, which requires a multi-agency response. Mutual aid arrangements are also in place with neighbouring fire and rescue services to provide formal reinforcement and support in the event of a serious incident. The compliments in this section describe some of the feedback received from our partners:

“The family of the late [name] would like to record their thanks to members of Green Watch, Station A while attending an incident at [address] on [date]. The Incident Commander along with Ff's gained entry into the premises on behalf of NEAS. They carried out initial casualty care then carried her to the ambulance. The family would like to thank the crew for all their help and kindness shown at the incident...”

“As a employee of Tyne and Wear Metro, i just wanted to give credit to the men and women of our emergency services who attended the incident at [station name] Metro on [date] when a lady attempted suicide, but particulary the members of the fire service who attended in numbers and immediately went to work. After consultation with myself and colleague to ensure it was safe to go down track side, the speed, efficiency and professionalism in which they responded i feel needs highlighting and those involved congratulated. Although the lady may have life changing injuries, their efforts have surely meant that she is still with us. I may just be a small cog in a big wheel, but i just wanted to give credit where its due, we are lucky to have you all.”[sic]

“...there was a significant RTC within Northumberland which involved two LGVs, a flatbed lorry, a van, a private vehicle and multiple people trapped...TWFRS supported this incident with two appliances which was greatly appreciated, particularly given the number of ongoing incidents and the access difficulties in attending this incident from the north. Reports from NFRS officers in attendance stated that the TWFRS personnel were a fantastic help on scene. Five casualties were rescued from their vehicles... This is quite amazing having seen the extent and complications posed by the wreckages; both of our crews did an unbelievable job to release casualties considering the unconventional techniques that were required. I just wanted to give you an overview of the incident that prompted the request for support and pass on our thanks.”

“I work for NEAS and attended a incident...of a lady who had a fall in her house and entry had to be gained by your colleagues. First Aid was given first by your crews and the patient was monitored and given lots of reassurance until we arrived. A fantastic handover was given by Watch Manager [name]...also stayed so we could have help if needed from the crew to extract Patient from the property. It was first class example of two services working together. The professional and caring nature and help that was given to the lady was second to none. So please pass on my thanks to the crews. All fire staff involved are a credit to the service. Thank you.”

6.11.6 To ensure operational personnel are trained to undertake their roles competently and safely they regularly participate in fire service specific and multi-agency training and exercise. The Brigade Training Centre hosts several courses for the police, National Resilience and other fire and rescue services. The Service received positive feedback about the quality of its courses and its facilities. The examples demonstrate this:

“I would like to commend [name] on behalf of Northumbria Local Resilience Forum for his facilitation of the [name] multi agency debrief. He was exceptional and provided an inclusive environment for learning opportunities and all members felt that it was of significant benefit. The facilities were first class as always and as we strive for excellence in multi-agency training and exercising Barmston is becoming the focal point for all within this arena.”

“...thank you for hosting and assisting in the sessions. Our DVI (Disaster Victim Identification) team always get a great deal from coming down to work with the USAR teams to both learn elements of your world as well as getting together to come up with plans on how to carry out the recoveries and recording the data.”

“I would like to express sincere gratitude for the continuous support that we receive from Tyne & Wear FRS in hosting NR [National Resilience]-funded Skills Acquisition Training Courses. I appreciate the efforts put in by the team in establishing and maintaining professional relationships. Tyne & Wear FRS plays a pivotal role in the NR Training Delivery Partner framework...It is appreciated the strong partnership between NR Training and Tyne & Wear FRS, which will continue to thrive in the

“Just like to pass on our gratitude for hosting and assisting us with our USAR training at your fantastic facilities. Training with yourself and your team was invaluable and gives us the opportunity to train for scenarios that wouldn't be possible without your help. I hope in the future we will be able to use your facilities again with it being a top class training venue. Please pass on our appreciation to everyone involved in making this happen for us.”

6.11.7 As demonstrated previously, the impact employees have made in their roles can often be life changing and many go above and beyond their duties. A number of ‘thank yous’ were received from the public and partners about the support provided by employees both on and off duty. Without such feedback, these good deeds would pass unnoticed. Some of the appreciations linked to those goodwill gestures are included below:

“I am a rapid response paramedic...and I would like to notify you of a member of staff who helped me recently whilst they were off duty during a cardiac arrest at [name] Metro station. This lady was a bystander, carrying out CPR until my arrival on scene. Not only was she providing excellent effective CPR, but she remained on scene to assist me until my colleagues arrived to help on an ambulance crew. This all took place whilst her daughter and dog were nearby. Her professional manor [sic] and knowledge of first aid was exceptional and I would like you to pass on my thank you for her help as she left before I had the opportunity to speak to

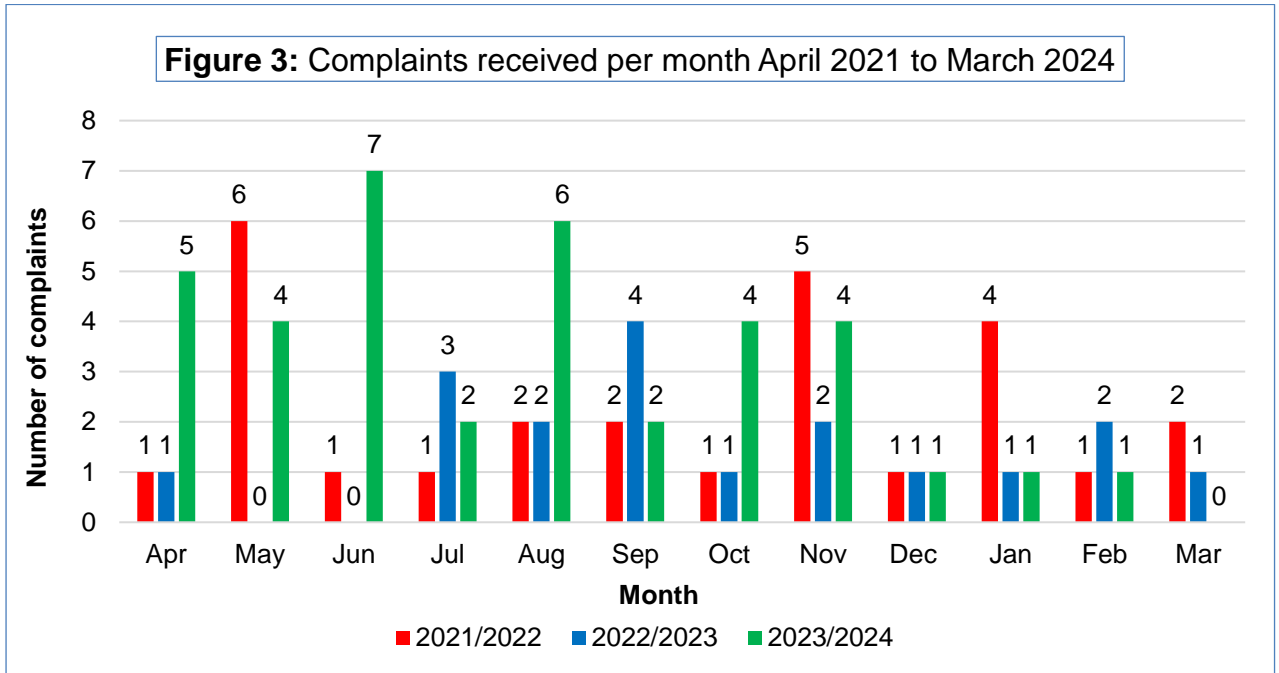
“I just wanted to send an email to say thank you. Today I broke down on the 1231 and one of your members of staff...stopped to assist myself and my children. I'm very grateful she followed me home safely! I didn't catch her name but thank you again!”

“I'm not sure if I'm messaging the correct station but last night my husband & I were stuck in the mud with our motor home just outside of the [location]. A fire engine passed & my hubby flagged it down. The lads went straight around the roundabout and came back, parked up beside us & everyone got out and pushed us out of the mud & on our way & I just want to thank them all so much.”

7. Total complaints received

7.1 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’.

7.2 Figure 3 illustrates the number of complaints received per month for the last three financial years. The 38 complaints received were more than double the 2022/2023 figure of 18 and 11 more than the 27 complaints received during 2021/2022.



7.3 Although there has been an increase in the number of complaints received, this remains low when compared with the 71,551 ‘official’ interactions recorded. Further, the 2022/2023 figure of 18 was low when compared with the years prior whereby 29 complaints were received during 2019/2020 and 27 complaints were received for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. In addition, during 2023/2024 the Service saw a 22% increase in communication, which includes a 68% increase in contacts, and an 8% rise in compliments therefore an increase in complaints, was to be expected.

7.4 The Service received 16 complaints during the first quarter of 2023/2024; which almost equates to the total number of complaints (18) received for 2022/2023. During 2023/2024, complaints peak in June 2023 at seven; the highest monthly number total since May 2021 (6) and progressively reduce for the remainder of the year where from December 2023 onwards the complaints return to pre March 2023 monthly averages.

7.5 As discussed in point 6.7 the Service saw a reduction in the expected number of compliments during quarters 1 and 2 when compared with 2022/2023, which may have been impacted by the news coverage about the culture of the Service and the wider fire and rescue service. This too may have impacted the number of complaints received as during quarters 1 and 2 the Service received a higher than usual number of complaints, peaking in June 2023 and declining for the remainder of the year, which correlates with a decrease and then increase in the numbers of compliments received.

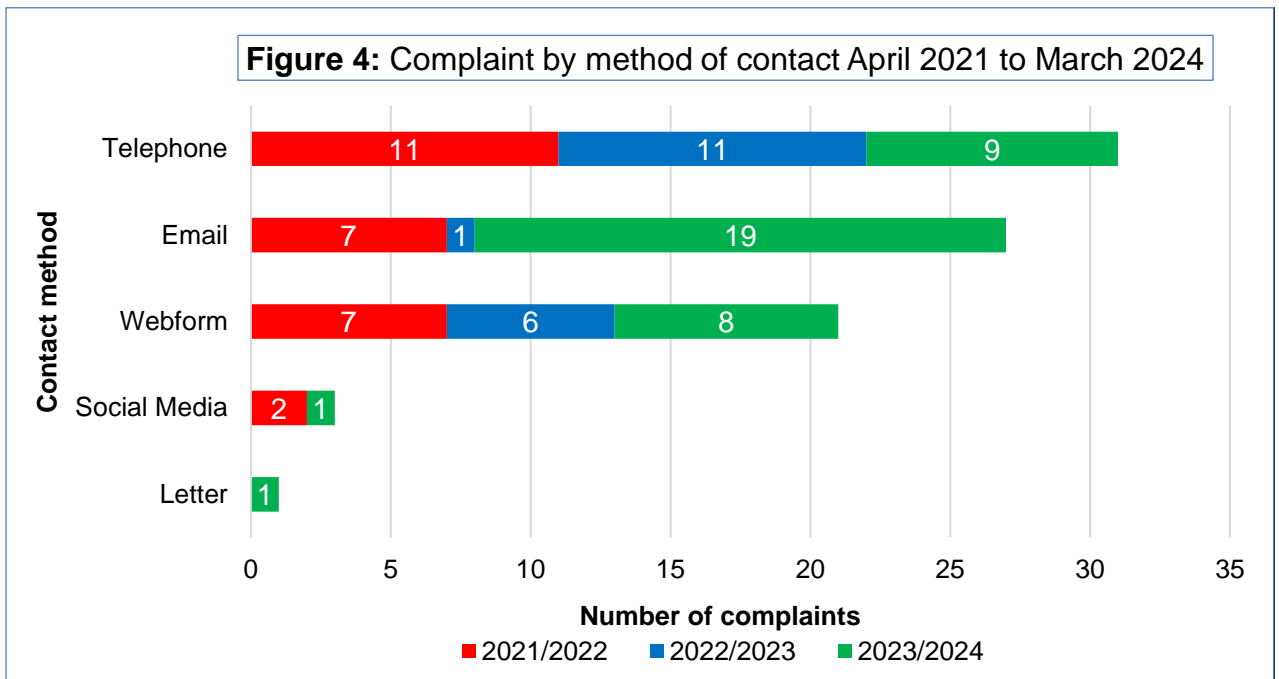
7.6 The compliments and complaints policy states ‘a complaint must be raised within 30 days of the event or incident in question. If complaints are raised after 30 days, TWFRS will be entitled not to deal with the complaint on the basis that it is out of time. This is because if

a complaint is made a long time after an incident then it can be more difficult to obtain evidence and this greatly reduces the ability of the Service to investigate matters.'

7.7 Using this definition, 7 of the 38 complaints received during 2023/2024 would be classified as 'out of time' (ranging from 8 months to 30 years) however, for transparency purposes the Service reviewed and investigated all complaints received regardless of the timeframe, again contributing to the increase in the number of complaints received during the year.

8. Complaints by method of contact

8.1 Figure 4 shows the number of complaints received by method of contact for the last three financial years. The data demonstrates that for 2023/2024, email was the preferred method to report a complaint (19), followed by telephone (9) web form (8), social media (1) and letter (1). For the previous two years, telephone was the preferred reporting method.



8.2 Enhancements to the Service’s webpage and the visibility of the compliments and complaints email address may have encouraged individuals to report their complaints by email. Further, attachments such as photographs and videos can be included which other methods are unable to facilitate and an email can be sent at a time to suit the complainant.

8.3 Figure 4 shows that four of the five communication methods have been consistent for the last three years however, during 2023/2024 one complainant chose to send a complaint via letter.

8.4 The Governance Advisor, Control Room, Business Services, Station Managers and Administrators received the complaints. Regardless of which department initially handled the complaint all were reported and recorded correctly through the appropriate channels.

9. Complaint by department

9.1 Table 2 shows the number of complaints received by department for the last three financial years, with Service Delivery consecutively receiving the highest number of complaints. As the largest department within the Service, with the most public contact, it is reasonable to expect that this department would receive the largest proportion of complaints.

Table 2: Complaints by department April 2021 to March 2024

Department	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/2022
Service Delivery	19	14	18
Prevention and Education	6	2	3
Fire Safety	4	1	3
Executive Leadership Team	3	0	0
Control	2	0	1
Estates and Facilities	1	1	2
Data, Intelligence and Safety	1	0	0
ICT	1	0	0
Service wide – not attributed to a department	1	0	0
Total	38	18	27

- 9.2 The Service's workforce comprises of 904⁹ employees, 573¹⁰ of which are Service Delivery operational personnel (63%). During 2023/2024, the 19 complaints attributed to Service Delivery equate to 0.1% of the 16,827 incidents attended. There has been an increase in the number of complaints attributed to Service Delivery, the percentage of complaints overall has decreased to 50% in 2023/2024 from 78% in 2022/2023 and 67% in 2021/2022.
- 9.3 Prevention and Education and Fire Safety are the next two departments with the highest number of complaints, which collectively form 26% of the total complaints received during 2023/2024. Similarly, to Service Delivery, these teams are public facing and during the year conducted 20,762 Safe and Well visits and 2,812 fire safety activities, again it is reasonable to expect a high proportion of complaints to be attributed to those departments.
- 9.4 For the first time in three years, complaints were received about the Executive Leadership Team, Data, Intelligence and Safety department and the ICT department. A further complaint was received about a public consultation and has been categorised as a 'service wide' complaint as this did not refer to a specific department.

10. Complaint by cause and outcome

- 10.1 Identifying the cause of a complaint supports analysis and provides an instructive way to understand where the Service may need to target improvements. The outcome is determined by the investigating officer and approved by the DCFO. Categories include:
- **Upheld** if the Service or employee were found to be a fault, did not act in line with guidance or procedure, provided a poor service or where an action or decision negatively impacted on an individual.
 - **Partly upheld** if the Service or employee may have gotten some things wrong, but not all the issues that were complained about.
 - **Not upheld** if the Service or employee provided a standard of service that a reasonable person could expect.
- 10.2 When a complaint is upheld in whole or part, an apology is provided (where appropriate), an explanation about what occurred, and the actions taken to address the concern(s) raised and/or any improvements made or intended to be made to service provision.
- 10.3 Table 3 shows the 2023/2024 complaints divided into categories by cause and outcome.

^{9&10} Source: CORE HR correct at 31 March 2024.

- 10.4 The data shows that 21 of the 38 (55%) complaints were not upheld. Of the remaining 45%, 17 complaints, 9 (24%) were fully upheld and 8 (21%) were partly upheld, overall an increase of 17% on the 2022/2023 figure of 28%.

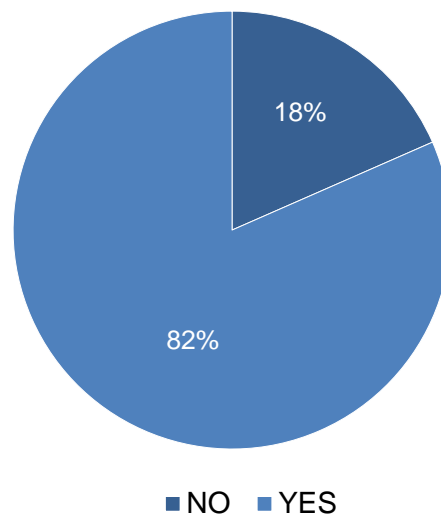
Table 3: Complaints by cause and outcome April 2023 to March 2024

Causes of complaint	Total	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
On duty conduct	15	2	3	10
Communication issue	5	1	3	1
Off duty conduct	4	1	2	1
Operational decision	3			3
Siren use/noise	2	2		
Discourteous driving	2	1		1
Social media	2			2
Nuisance smoke	1	1		
Damage to property	2	1		1
Charitable donation	1			1
Fire safety concern	1			1
Total	38	9	8	21

- 10.5 The highest number of complaints were about on duty conduct (15) which formed 39% of the total complaints however, following investigation only five (33%) of these complaints were fully or partly upheld.
- 10.6 There were two complaint categories where the complaints were fully upheld and these were, the volume of the turnout systems at two fire stations and smoke being emitted from the live firefighting training unit. The investigations determined that the turnout systems were set above the level appropriate for an operational fire station, and action was taken to correct the configuration. The training unit's filtration system required adaptation and remedial works were carried out.
- 10.7 No complaints received about operational decisions, social media, charitable donations or the fire safety concern were upheld.
- 10.8 As the content of the complaints varied there was little in the way of Service-wide learning. Remedial actions were linked to the individuals involved in the complaint and their line manager monitored action(s) arising from a complaint and where appropriate developed a plan with the relevant employee or team.
- 10.9 During quarter four 2023/2024, the Service piloted a 'complaint recommendation – lessons identified proforma' to capture the actions taken to improve the matters identified from complaint investigations and will be looking to further enhance this process.

11. Complaint performance against timescale

- 11.1 Complaint performance is monitored against a locally set timescale of 28 days and as shown in Figure 5, 82% (31 of the 38 complaints) were investigated and closed within the timescale. Although a decrease of 12% from the previous year (17 of the 18, 94%), the number of complaints investigated and closed within 28 days increased by 82%. From this perspective, the Service could be viewed as exceeding expectations in terms of performance.
- 11.2 There were seven (18%) instances where the investigation extended beyond 28 days. In each case, the complainant was informed (7 days in advance) and an explanation and revised deadline were provided.

Figure 5: Performance against timescale 2023/2024

- 11.3 One extension to the timescale was requested by the complainant as they were unable to participate in the process and the other six were complex investigations which required additional time to conduct multiple interviews and to retrieve and analyse data.
- 11.4 The Service monitors the number of days taken to close a complaint however; the time taken by an employee to investigate a complaint is not quantified. Some complaints are straightforward and involve little resource to resolve while others take much longer to resolve. During 2023/2024, a small number of complaints took up a disproportionate amount of time and resource, which was disadvantageous to the Service as the investigator role is an additional task assigned to employees at Station Manager/corporate equivalent level or above.

12 Training and developments during 2023/2024

- 12.1 As part of the Service's periodic review of its policies the compliments and complaints policy and procedure was refreshed and republished in June 2023.
- 12.2 A designated compliment and complaint module has been developed and incorporated into the supervisory manager course and three courses have taken place this year. In addition, a complaint scenario was used as part of the Watch Manager promotion process.
- 12.3 In October 2023, 48 employees participated in two LGO Effective Complaint Handling sessions, one for Station Managers/corporate equivalent and above roles and the second for the Fire Safety department. Since May 2021, 119 employees have undertaken this training including members of the Executive Leadership Team. This rolling programme supports the continuity of complaint investigators by ensuring that employees in specific roles are trained as investigators following internal promotion or a new appointment.

13 Conclusion

- 13.1 This report should assure the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders that the Service operates a robust policy, procedure and process for the management of complaints. This was also evidenced by the informal feedback received from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) during the December 2023 thematic inspection whereby no issues were identified in respect of the management of complaints which was deemed to be exceptionally thorough.