



COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This purpose of this report is to outline the number of compliments and complaints received by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. During this period, the Service received 170 compliments and 30 complaints, 29 of which were investigated by the Service. Compliments and complaints are managed in accordance with the Services' compliment and complaint policy and procedure. The primary objective is to record the information and to resolve each complaint promptly.
- 1.2 The Service provides the highest quality service to the communities of Tyne and Wear. It recognises the importance of feedback in understanding its overall performance. This feedback not only highlights the exceptional activities undertaken by employees, allowing them to receive recognition for their efforts, but also identifies areas that require improvement.
- 1.3 Overall, the feedback from the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders was positive, with many recognising the exceptional service provided by employees, even in cases where complaints were lodged.
- 1.4 While feedback offers valuable insights into the Service's performance, the figures for compliments and complaints do not represent a complete picture. Therefore, this report should be understood in the context of the 86,037 'official' interactions recorded during 2024/2025, which included:
 - 34,970¹ emergency calls taken by the Control Room;
 - 17,628² incidents attended;
 - 26,957³ Safe and Well Checks undertaken, and
 - 6,482⁴ fire safety activities⁵ conducted.
- 1.5 The percentage of complaints to official interactions is 0.03%, while compliments represent 0.2% of interactions.
- 1.6 The Service is open and accountable by actively listening to the views of service users and the wider community, placing their feedback at the heart of its operations. Whether a compliment or a complaint, such feedback is a vital indicator of the Service's performance.
- 1.7 Sections 6 and 7 of this report detail the number of compliments and complaints received and summarise their subjects. Additionally, Section 7 outlines the outcomes and timescales associated with complaints, as well as the actions taken to improve services based on the feedback received. The information collected is used to identify learning opportunities and areas for improvement.

¹ Source: Mobilising system for calls, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025.

² Source: Incident Recording System, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025.

³ Source: CFRMIS for Safe and Well data 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025.

⁴ Source: CFRMIS for fire safety activities, 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025.

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. Key headlines for 2024/2025

- The Service received 49 contacts, an increase of 17% from 42 in 2023/2024.
- There were 170 compliments received, which remained unchanged from 2023/2024.
- A total of 30 complaints were received; one complaint was outside the scope of the Service's complaints process and was investigated by Sunderland City Council.
- Of the 30 complaints, 29 were investigated by, which is nine fewer than the 38 received in 2023/2024, representing a decrease of 24%.
- Eleven complaints (38%) were fully or partly upheld following investigation, compared to 17 (45%) in 2023/2024, reflecting a decrease of 7%.
- Complaints regarding on duty conduct decreased, with nine compared to 15 in 2023/2024, representing a decrease of 40%.
- Complaints about discourteous driving increased by 50% from two complaints in 2023/2024 to four complaints in 2024/2025.
- 25 out of 29 (86%) complaint investigations were completed within 28 days, an increase of 4% from 2023/2024 where 31 of 38 complaints (82%) were resolved within the same timeframe.
- One complaint was escalated to Stage 2; the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO) reviewed the appeal and upheld the original decision, consistent with the number of appeals in 2023/2024.
- One complaint was escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) and was closed after initial enquiries; this figure is consistent with the previous year.
- 18 employees participated in Effective Compliant Handling training with the Ombudsman.
- 71 employees completed the compliment and complaints module as part of the Service's supervisory management development pathway course.

3. Service correspondence 2024/2025

- 3.1 This section outlines the correspondence received in the compliments and complaints mailbox during 2024/2025, comprising 170 compliments, 30 complaints and 49 contacts. Any correspondence that was neither a compliment nor a complaint was categorised as a contact. For transparency, these contacts have been categorised based on the type of requests received. Upon receipt, each contact was reviewed and directed to the relevant department for appropriate action.
- 3.2 Table 1 provides a breakdown of the correspondence received, showing a 1.6% decrease in correspondence when compared with 253 recorded in 2023/2024. This decrease is attributed to a reduction in the number of complaints, which dropped from 38 in 2023/2024 to 29 in 2024/2025. Compliments remained consistent at 170, while contacts increased by 17%, rising from 42 in 2023/2024 to 49 in 2024/2025.

Table 1: Correspondence received from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Correspondence	Count
Compliments	170
Complaints	30
TWFRS	29
Other – redirected to Sunderland City Council	1
Contacts	49
Fire safety concern	11
Incident follow up or query	6
Claim – vehicle/property	5
Home safety check/smoke alarm replacement/education	4
Work placements, student surveys or careers fare	4
Social media/media comments and queries	4
Canvassing	3
Miscellaneous	3
Charity donation or offer of donation of goods	2
Data request	2
Employment matter	2
Hebburn tri-station	2
Volunteer matter	1
Total	249

- 3.3 The following sections of this report focus on the 170 compliments and the 29 complaints investigated by the Service.

4. Accountability for compliment and complaint management

- 4.1 The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for holding the CFO accountable for performance of the Service on behalf of the communities of Tyne and Wear. The CFO has delegated the management of Service compliments and complaints to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) or, in their absence, a designated member of the Executive Leadership Team.
- 4.2 The Service has sufficient resources to manage compliments and complaints effectively. The Executive Services Manager, supported by the Governance Advisor and the Executive Services Team oversee the day-to-day management of compliments and complaints.

5. Dealing with compliments and complaints

Compliments

- 5.1 The Service defines a compliment as *‘praise given by a service user or partner for a service provided, or to thank an individual, team or department for their actions’*.
- 5.2 Where contact details are provided, compliments are acknowledged by the recipient. The details of the compliment are shared with the individual or teams mentioned, along with their manager. Compliments are logged and published internally for employee reference.

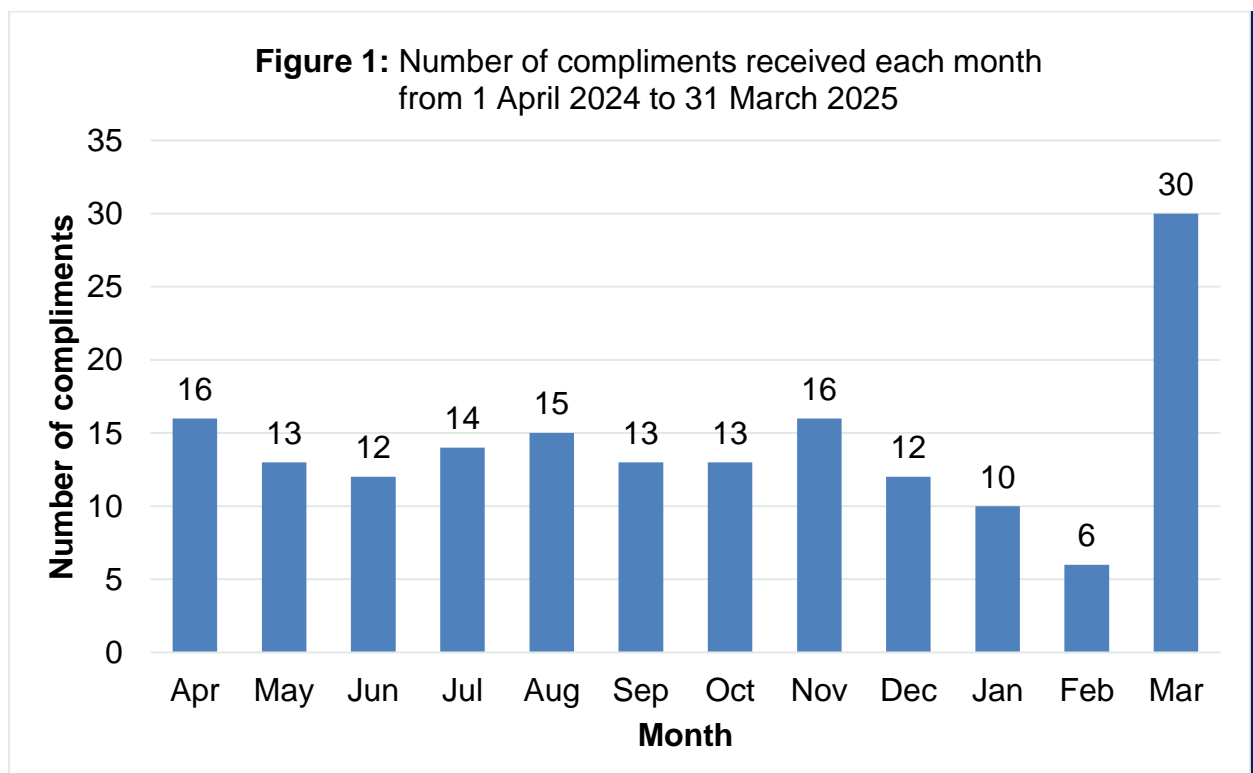
Complaints

- 5.3 The Service defines a complaint 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’*.
- 5.4 The Service follows a two-stage complaint process, and the complainant is advised of their right to contact the Ombudsman throughout the process. At Stage 1, complaints may be resolved through frontline resolution (for simple issues requiring little or no investigation) or through a formal investigation, if it is clear from the outset that the complaint requires investigation, or where the complainant is dissatisfied with frontline resolution. The complainant is notified in writing of the outcome within 28 days or as soon as the outcome is known. The response letter includes information on how to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 if the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 outcome.
- 5.5 At Stage 2, a different investigating officer is assigned. The CFO may choose to review or investigate the complaint themselves, or:
- forward the complaint and Stage 1 investigation report and data to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) for their review, or
 - appoint a new investigating officer for a secondary investigation to take place.
- 5.6 At the conclusion of Stage 2, the complainant is notified in writing of the outcome within 28 days, or as soon as the outcome is known. This response concludes the Service’s complaint process.

6. Service compliments 2024/2025

6.1 Number of compliments

- 6.1.1 Figure 1 shows the number of compliments received each month from the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders.



- 6.1.2 The total number of compliments received in 2024/2025 was 170, which is the same figure as received in 2023/2024. Over the past four years, the Service has encouraged the sharing of compliments internally beyond individuals, teams and departments to ensure they are reported centrally and included in reports like this one. Internal interdepartmental compliments have not been included in this count.
- 6.1.3 Figure 1 shows a consistent flow of compliments throughout the year, with a decline from December 2024 onwards, followed by a sharp increase in March 2025. This spike is linked to several events that took place during March 2025, including the Service being awarded the title of UK Fire and Rescue Service of the Year at the iESE Awards on 5 March 2025. The Service also hosted the Regional Women's Development Day on 6 March 2025, and Exercise Cerberus on 26 March 2025, in addition to holding a time capsule burial ceremony at Hebburn Tri-Station on 31 March 2025, to mark its 50th anniversary. All of these factors contributed to the increase in the number of compliments received in March. This trend differs from previous years, which typically saw a peak in compliments received during the summer and autumn months. The last high volume of compliments received in one month occurred in July 2023 with 26 recorded.

6.2 Compliment subject

- 6.2.1 The Service records compliments verbatim ensuring that they reflect the exact feedback provided, including any grammatical and spelling errors. Compliments have only been modified to remove personal identifiers or to shorten the text, using an ellipsis (three dots) to indicate where text has been omitted. A selection of compliments received during 2024/2025 are included in sections 6.3 to 6.10 which demonstrate the wide range of services provided and contributions made by employees.
- 6.2.2 The compliments have been categorised into the following seven groups:
- Community engagement.
 - Fire safety advice and activities.
 - Emergency response – firefighting.
 - Emergency response – other.
 - Partnership working.
 - Operational training.
 - Charitable deeds performed by employees both on and off duty.
 - Equality, diversity and inclusion.

6.3 Community engagement

- 6.3.1 Our approach to community engagement includes a variety of activities that connect with the residents of Tyne and Wear. The Service organises visits to Safetyworks for children, young people and community groups. These visits allow participants to learn more about the fire service and to receive information and advice on important topics such as fire, water and road safety. Additional community engagement activities include school visits, station visits, participation in religious events, attendance at events such as Pride and outreach to community groups and centres.
- *“...pass on my thanks to the Fire Service, particularly the White Watch who came to visit us on Friday. The kids absolutely loved their visit and have not stopped talking about. The crew were so lovely with the children and explained things to them in a way that they could understand. Please pass on my sincere thanks to the watch as I really do appreciate them taking time out of their busy day to come and visit us.”*

- *“Wow!!!! We bought our group to the fire station (elswick road) we are from Newcastle oaktrees which is a rehab for adults in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. X gave us a tour of the station and can I just say this man is a selfless wonderful human!!! He made us feel so welcome and is just an all around amazing person! What a credit to the fire service he is. He’s funny, kind, brave and charismatic! Amazing morning thanks to him!!”*
- *“I would like to pass on a huge, huge thank you to X from the White Watch who were able to come along to our school fair on [date]. The children (and grown ups!!) were absolutely delighted with their visit and the huge efforts that they made - especially returning after a call out! Thank once again, we appreciate everything you do!”*
- *“I wanted to send an email to thank you for organising the firework/bonfire safety talk today. It made the pupils consider the implications their actions can have and provoked further conversations in lessons. We appreciate being able to access this level of support and for the pupils to hear the key information from trained professionals; it certainly has more impact. Thanks again.”*
- *“I wanted to thank you for being part of our Family Fun Day. Having the fire engine there is so exciting for the kids. I appreciate you are on active service and, on the day, you had to dash off to a call. But it was amazing that you were able to be there and help to make it a wonderful day for so many people.”*
- *“The club members mostly aged between 80 and 90 years old had the presentation by a member of your organisation a lady called X, she gave an excellent presentation answered all the questions asked she also assisted members fill in the forms requesting smoke alarms. We would like you to pass on our thanks to her for a first class job, she is a excellent representative for your organization, and thanks for all yous do for the community.”*
- *“Thanks for the visit today. The children got a lot of it and we are finding that they are much less aware of things like the 999 services and accessibility (where they say a parents has to call) so it is really useful for them. Obviously we balance this with making the point it is emergencies only. They do a lot of work with forest school on risk assessing so it is useful for them to see how this translates to home and then what to do if things go wrong.”*

6.4 Fire safety advice and activities

6.4.1 A core function of the Service is to promote fire safety through interventions both at home and within the community. We have received numerous expressions of appreciation from service users and members of the public for our fire safety advice and interventions:

- *“I just wanted to pass my feedback and thanks onto X for all her support yesterday. We did unfortunately come across a customer in crisis, and I was really impressed with how calm and supportive X was, in what was a very stressful situation. I was really grateful for her support which allowed me to make necessary phone calls to our teams to get him the help he needs whilst she remained with the customer.”*
- *“Hello. It was just actually let you know I've had two fire lads in today putting alarms in my home. And when I explained I couldn't hear very well they put a sensory alarm in... they were both really, really very good. And I would be much appreciated if you could tell them on my behalf. Thank you so much for their help, nothing was the problem.”*

- *“Mrs X thought the delivery of the Safe & Well was excellent. Mrs X’s daughter was also present at the time of the Safe & Well and she asked questions that X would not of thought of, which were answered professionally and thoroughly. Mrs X was very impressed with the Service she received from you both”.*
- *“Hello, my name is [name] and I’m ringing from [address]. I’ve just had one of your operatives here to check my smoke alarm. She’s moved one. She was absolutely wonderful. I had an issue with the alarm in the kitchen this morning, she was actually changed it to another room. She’s checked both smoke alarms and she’s done an amazing job. And as an elderly lady living alone, she’s giving me a lot of confidence because I was getting very, very nervy about it. She is wonderful...”*
- *“Recently my wife and I noticed unusual noises arising from our fire alarms. As they have been in place for several years we contacted the Swalwell Station to ask for advice. A fire adviser X was sent to our house in [location] and we were extremely impressed by the help and advice we were given. X removed and replaced our old alarms and checked out the rest of our property. The advice she provided was excellent and delivered in a clear, down to earth manner...Please pass on our thanks to X.”*

6.5 Emergency response – firefighting

6.5.1 Compliments were also noted from service users and the public regarding the response of our operational personnel during house and business fires. All feedback emphasised the promptness, swift actions and professionalism displayed by the crew. For example:

- *“Hi, just wanted to say a massive thank you for all of the fire crews at attendance last night and throughout this morning at [address]! You don’t get enough credit for what you actually do, there within 4 mins and straight into action! My partner has a business on that street so we were very anxious as you could imagine but with the quick response and professionalism and experience from the crews it was saved, unfortunately for others they weren’t so lucky! I know there was about 7/8 crews from different areas so I’d like them to be notified of the tremendous work.”*
- *“I would just like to thank the crews that attended my neighbours house fire on Sunday afternoon. Firstly for putting out the fire and making the house safe and secondly for trying so hard to find her cats who were trapped in the house. They found both cats and worked just as hard to save their lives as putting out the fire. Sadly one could not be saved but their dedication to trying to save him was admirable. Thank you so much!”*
- *“A massive thank you to everyone involved in an incident that happened last night in [address] my car was set alight in the early hours and within a few minutes you were there I can’t thank you enough I really appreciate it.”*
- *“Just want to say thanks for the magnificent response to a caravan on fire [location] a few doors away from my house. Great job & fast fast fast response. Please pass on my thanks to all involved with this call out. Next thing I know a knock on the door asking if i had working smoke alarms, which i don't & an offer of 2 to be fitted was taken up & done WOW! Thanks again to everyone involved. PS please mention this to everyone at the station that we appreciate what you do 365 days a year 24 hours a day. YOU LOT ARE SIMPLY THE BEST.”*

- *“X praised the work of the oncoming crews and was so impressed with how quickly you responded. Mrs X couldn’t thank you all enough. She stated “I have one pack of fags left and that’s it!”. She will be seeking quitting via a smoking cessation programme.”*
- *“Appreciated and a massive THANK YOU for the response last night Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and Northumbria Police in [location] for the fire right next to my home, one of the garages, these kids targeted one of the UNITS WINDSCREEN. Thank you for your service and what you shouldn’t have to put up with.”*

6.6 Emergency response – other

6.6.1 In addition to firefighting, our operational personnel respond to road traffic collisions, conduct technical rescues involving people and animals, and attend to life-threatening medical emergencies. Below are some of the thank yous received for these types of incidents:

- *“I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you and your entire team for rescuing the five people on the River Tyne last night. All of us at Tyne are incredibly grateful for your quick response and the tremendous teamwork you demonstrated. Your efforts made a massive difference, and we deeply appreciate everything you did.”*
- *“Re Compliment to the fire operator, from 999 call following been trapped in the lift in [location] on [date]. I am writing to thank the Emergency Services Operator who answered the 999 call from me on [telephone number] 14.15hours. As a way of background, I got trapped in the lift with my 6 year old daughter who was terrified, but the calm and professional operator, but my daughter and myself at ease by talking to her. A unit was dispatched. I would like to pass on my highest thanks to the chief officer...All I know I am very glad that the fire service to assist.”*
- *“On the afternoon of the [date] I had a nasty accident while out walking my dog in [location]. Two ambulance crews attended to me but they had to request that one of your crews attend the scene - due to the fact that they were unable to carry me from the field to the ambulance which was on [address]. I would like to thank your personnel for helping me, and the Medics in carrying me to the ambulance - Thank you.”*
- *“I would like to pass on my heartfelt thanks for the rescue of my puppy [name] on the [date] in [location] everyone involved are amazing and you are all a fantastic team he was all shook up but is now fine just a bit bruised and getting plenty cuddles at home once again thank you from the bottom of my heart from myself and my daughter [name] and my dog walker who was with him thanks again...god bless you all.”*
- *“Your Blue Watch are absolute legends. I had the regrettable task of calling out the crews last night to my daughter and the dog, who were trapped in her bedroom due to the door latch mechanism failing. They were polite, efficient, friendly and caused the minimum amount of damage, so I just wanted to tell you they did a blinding job! My only complaint is that they had to release both daughter and dog, and not just the dog!”*

6.7 Partnership working

6.7.1 Partnership with other blue light agencies and organisations is crucial in delivering the best possible service to the communities of Tyne and Wear. Our operational personnel

adhere to the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles (JESIP) when responding to emergencies, which necessitates a multi-agency response. The compliments in this section reflect positive feedback received from our partners:

- *"Hi, I just wanted to reach out and express my thanks once again to both of you and all of the crew that responded to Friday's case. I really appreciate all of the support in helping an extremely vulnerable resident to achieve a positive outcome in a difficult situation. Please pass on my thanks to everyone. It certainly demonstrated excellent partnership work and the importance of being able to call on your work friends in difficult times. That said, I also recognise that the gentleman was only eligible for the response, as TWFS had already been involved in the incident. Thanks again"*
- *"I have received an email of thanks in relation to the professionalism of TWFRS supporting Police Operations on [date]. The Inspector was very complimentary of the professionalism of the FRS... Officers who attended and supported the incident."*
- *"Hi there, My names X I'm a paramedic with the ambulance service. I'm writing to give an appreciation to the firefighters that assisted us on a job in [location] for a [age] that was stuck in the bathroom but sadly went into cardiac arrest when we moved him. We all want to say a huge thank you because without their help it wouldn't have been possible for things to have ran as smoothly as they did. They helped give him the best possible chance at life but he sadly died when he arrived at hospital. Please pass on our upmost appreciation for them as we couldn't have done it without them."*
- *"Good morning, Peter, I am silver commander tonight where we have had a vulnerable [age] female reported as missing which we placed at high risk of harm. We encountered difficulties with utilising one of our drones and NPAS. TWFRS assisted with one of their drones which helped locate the female safely. Could you pass on my thanks to your team please, much appreciated."*
- *"I wanted to drop you a quick acknowledgement of our thanks and appreciation from everyone at the North East Ambulance Service for the support that your officers and senior teams have provided over the weekend. In particular, some of our ambulance crews temporarily co-located to your station in X and reported that they felt well looked after by your staff. Building bonds such as these during periods of intense pressure and appalling scenes of violence can only help our closer working relationships for the future. My teams tell me that our crews felt well supported and safe – thank you. The close collaboration between us undoubtedly ensured that we were kept well informed of key intelligence, allowing us to keep our patients and colleagues safe throughout the weekend. It was an excellent example of close working with our blue light partners with good support from the wider Local Resilience Forum and employing JESIP principles well. Please pass on all our thanks."*
- *"The casualty called our Control to say he is now home, he does not have a broken bone in his leg but he is laid up in bed. He called Control to thank you for the hard work and professionalism that you showed at the incident. He couldn't speak highly enough of you. It was a bit of a different type of incident considering how the casualty ended up in that position but you and the crews worked hard to release him and then worked with HART and HEMs whilst he was being treat before going to the RVI. Can you pass on your thanks to your crews again and update them of his condition."*
- *"Just a big thanks to your team for an...incident in Northumberland that X attended. The attending officers were fantastic and professional throughout - a true credit to FRS. Cannot thank them enough for their expertise! Please pass on my thanks!"*

6.8 Operational training

6.8.1 To ensure that our operational personnel are trained to perform their roles competently and safely, they regularly participate in both fire service specific and multi-agency training and exercises. The Brigade Training Centre hosts various courses for the police, National Resilience and other fire and rescue services, and received the following expressions of gratitude:

- *“Thanks for accommodating us this week, it was very productive training for us and there is so much to do up there. It really is an excellent site and we are great full to be able to use it. Please pass on our gratitude to your team and all involved.”*
- *“Thank you for allowing X to put on such a good event over the last few days. The facilities there are excellent for what we need and allow all objectives to be met. The facilitation of activities, admin and refreshments really was executed brilliantly. I have been receiving texts personally thanking me, but all the credit goes to you for your time and professionalism spent organising this event.”*
- *“...we wanted to say a huge thank you for being an instructor and assisting with the delivery of the ‘Multi incident scenario’ workshop, at the Training and Development Event. We are truly grateful for your enthusiasm and your ability to make this workshop special for our delegates. The success of this workshop, is down to the instructors like yourself, who are committed to providing a fantastic opportunity to all of those attending. Without you and the rest of the team, we would not be able to deliver such a diverse choice of workshops. Thank you once again for your invaluable contribution, we really value your support.”*
- *“Excellent trainers and facilities. Trainer knowledge second to none. Aimed at the right level. Great scenario and facilities. Also a really positive vibe with all Tyne and Wear staff, really refreshing to see especially the reception staff. Really welcoming and a credit to Tyne and Wear FRS.”*
- *“Thanks very much, on behalf of all the X staff, for hosting us for a couple of days. As is always the case at Tyne and Wear we were made to feel very welcome and both the facilities and refreshments/catering were first class. Can you please pass on our thanks to everyone involved, the corporate team for setting up the room, X for the catering and the officers for giving us their time both on Tuesday and Wednesday. Finally, can you pass our thanks to Peter and ensure to let him know that everyone we met over the two days were a credit to the service.”*

6.9 Charitable deeds performed by employees both on and off duty

6.9.1 As previously mentioned, the positive impact that our employees can make in their roles can be life changing, with many going above and beyond their duties. The Service has received numerous thank you messages from the public and partners for the support provided by employees, both on and off duty. Without this feedback, many good deeds may go unnoticed. Here are some expressions of gratitude for these acts of goodwill:

- *“Hi. My son...was in [location] watching the Newcastle v West Ham Game. He cut his hand on broken glass which was on a table in the pub. An off duty fire fighter helped stem the blood and bandaged him up and even escorted my son to the A&E in the nearby hospital. I want to find this firefighter to express my gratitude and thanks for his professionalism and kindness shown to my son. My son thinks his name was X*

but with the shock of what happened he isn't sure. If you could assist me in identifying this gentleman I'd greatly appreciate it."

- *"Good morning Chief, I write to thank you for allowing the participation of Tyne and Wear Fire & Rescue Service in the above late officer's funeral in Sunderland yesterday. Your ceremonial team, led by X were very well turned- out, they conducted themselves correctly and with great dignity and were very much a credit to the service. I commend their first class contribution to you."*
- *"We are absolutely overwhelmed by your incredible donation of £615! Your generosity will make a tangible difference in the lives of women in our community, helping us to continue providing vital support and resources to those who need it most. From funding supplies for our patrols to supporting our outreach initiatives, every penny of your donation will go directly toward making women feel safer and more supported. Thank you for believing in our mission and standing with us to create a better future. With heartfelt gratitude."*
- *"Just like to thank the firefighters of station Railway Row who assisted me last night [date] when my coach backend got beached while turning outside the station in Sunderland on route to picking up the Army Cadets. Most appreciate the entire team for their efforts."*
- *"I had a bad fall in Newcastle City Centre... and split my head. This was outside [location]. One of your appliances stopped and pulled over to assist and look after me until an ambulance arrived. I cannot thank the firemen who helped me and my son enough! My 15 year old was quite traumatised as I was bleeding and had a large gash to my forehead. The men went out of their way to make sure my son was okay as well as looking after me. I just wanted to say a huge thank you from both of us!!"*
- *"An elderly lady phoned the station to explain that she was in a shop and found that some of her items were more expensive than she expected. Firefighter X paid for her shopping while engaging in conversation. She expressed that it was a stressful situation for her, and she was very appreciative of his kind gesture, describing him as a lovely lad."*
- *I hope you could see how much we appreciate your donations and how well we have used the money to create such a wonderful place to learn. The area was previously used as a cloakroom and reading books were housed along corridors. Through your kind donations and volunteers of help we managed to transform the cloakroom area into a space to house the bookcases. This helped create a calming room where children can read, intervention groups can be delivered and a wellbeing zone for times when busy classrooms are too overwhelming...All of this has only been possible through the kind donations and volunteers of help to make a dream come true! A huge thank you to you as a fire service for the kind donation..."*
- *"During [event], a member of the public unfortunately began experiencing a seizure in front of the NEAS stall, myself and a colleague stepped in to provide what assistance we could while we awaited the arrival of a on duty ambulance crew. This incident happened in the middle of the event surrounded by members of the public, while helping this gentleman the best we could we looked up to find two volunteers had stepped in without being asked to create a safe perimeter around us and the gentleman to allow us to help this gentleman and get him onto the back of our event vehicle out of the view of the public. These two individuals went above and beyond what would have been expected of them to help someone in need."*

6.10 Equality, diversity, and inclusion

6.10.1 In delivering services, our employees are committed to making them accessible and inclusive to all, which includes understanding the needs of our service users. The compliments below showcase some of the interactions our employees have had with individuals possessing protected characteristics⁶ and how these interactions were positively received:

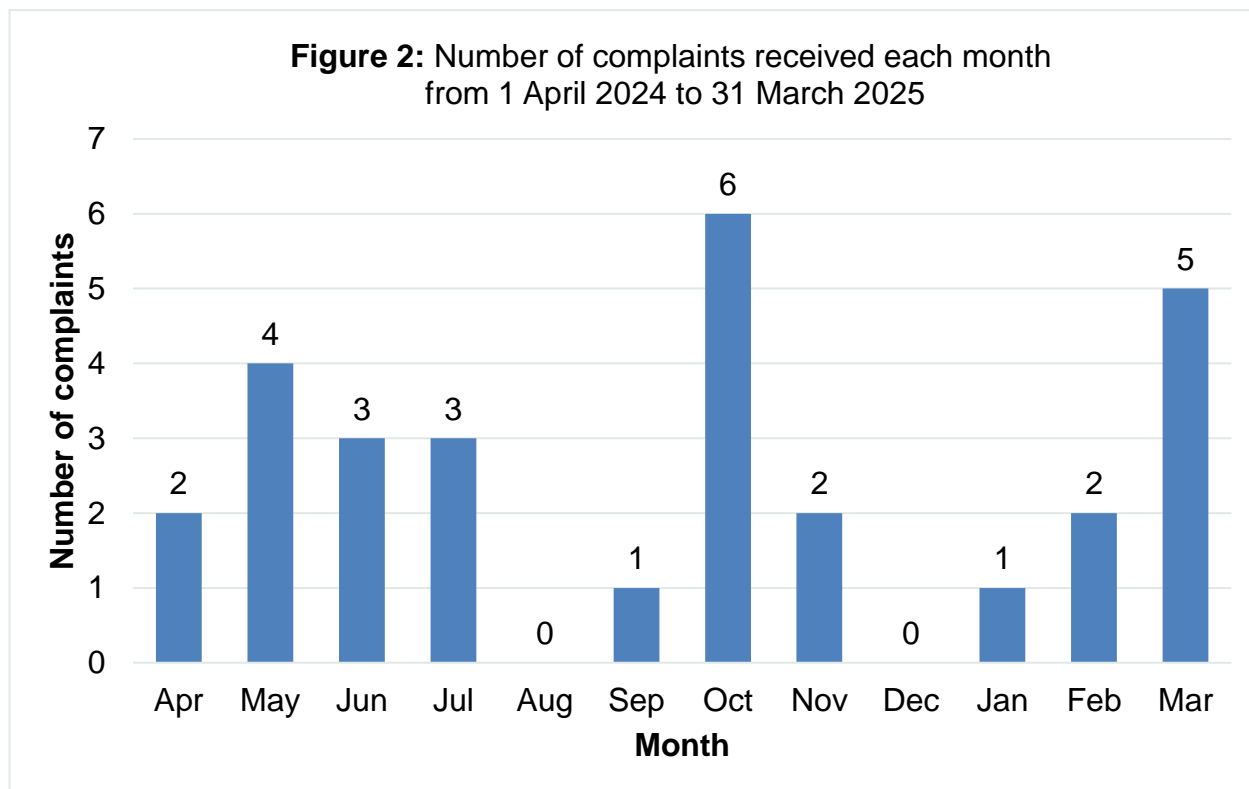
- *“Please can you pass on my praises to the firefighters from Byker fire station who attended Benton Dene School on [date]. We are a Special Educational Needs School, all firefighters were patient, calm and understanding of the needs of our children. They allowed the pupils to explore the fire engine, hose and their clothing at their own pace and supporting when needed. They are a credit to your service.”*
- *“Please can you commend your red watch as they were superb - my aunts next door neighbour who has severe mental health disabilities had damage to his fence and he was very distressed at the possibility of losing his precious rabbits, which his carers successfully moved to safety under the direction of the fire brigade.”*
- *“On [date] x attended one of our tenant meetings to deliver a talk about Fire Prevention. While X was here he also visited some of our more vulnerable tenants. The Fire Prevention talk was very well delivered, the messages were clear, and the tenants were engaged, we also had some family members there too. Some of those that attended were hard of hearing and some had memory issues. x made sure they were able to hear the messages by speaking clearly and added a few additional pieces of information for the family members of those with memory issues. There was nothing that was over complicated and the tenants were reassured by the messages X gave, they sometimes worry that they're going to be told off for things or for having the fire service attend for false alarms. Feedback from the tenants X visited after the session was very positive, again saying he was lovely and very reassuring.”*
- *“Just to say thank you for being there for us all. The 5th garden fire in our street [name], had to be put out...same house as well. I am especially grateful to you as my husband has severe COPD and breathing in that black smoke doesn't bear thinking about. Thank you for being there.”*
- *“Just wanted to thank all the people who were at the North Tyneside Together Festival on 31/08/2024. My son who is autistic was absolutely amazed by the stall with the uniform and other items. He was given a torch, a pen and a badge and was told about the cadet programme which he hasn't stopped talking about since! The firefighters at the vehicle were very patient with him when he asked questions and demonstrated putting on the uniform for him. He now wants to be a firefighter and went to bed holding his torch. Thanks for making his day special!”*
- *“Just to say thank you so much. We were in an accident on [date and time] in [address] and we were extremely shocked, upset etc. due to accident especially our special needs son [name] and all were absolutely amazing , especially the lad who said he had a dog called [name]. He was especially nice and kind and went above and beyond to keep [name] calm and happy cannot thank him enough, thank you to all of you for your fantastic help and support xxxx”*

⁶ Nine protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

7. Service complaints 2024/2025

7.1 Number of complaints

7.1.1 During 2024/2025, the Service investigated 29 complaints, compared to 38 in 2023/2024, representing a decrease of 24%. Figure 2 illustrates the number of complaints received each month, which ranged from zero to six complaints.



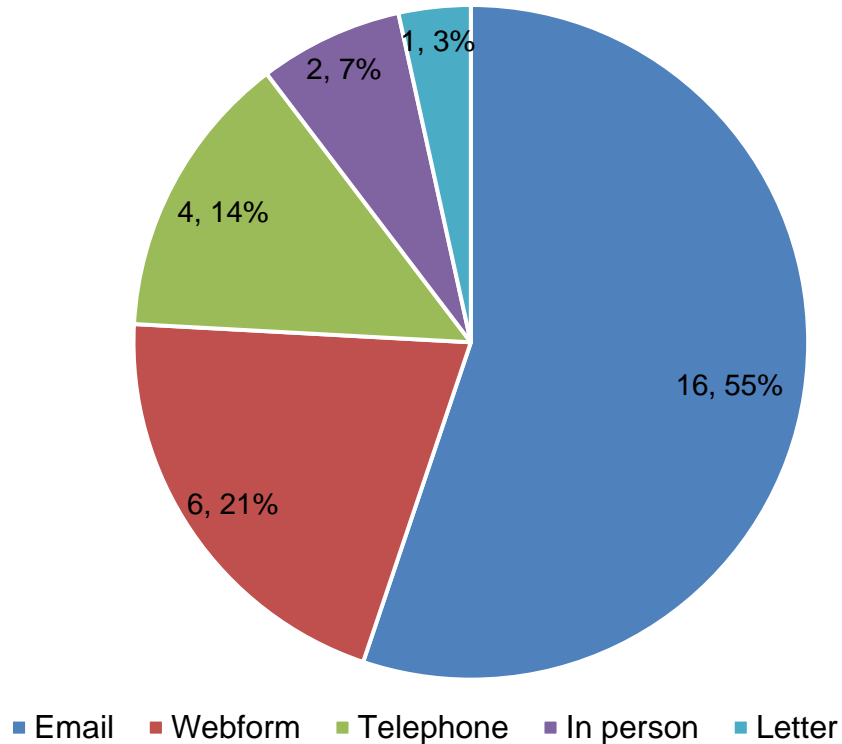
7.1.2 Complaints peaked in October 2024, totalling six, marking the highest monthly total since June 2023, when seven complaints were received. A review of the data showed no commonality among the types of complaints received in October 2024, which were attributed to five different departments and concerned various issues, including personal social media, on duty conduct and discourteous driving. Further detail on the specific subjects of the complaints is included in Section 7.3.

7.2 Complaints received by the method of contact

7.2.1 Complaints are received through various channels. As illustrated in Figure 3 overleaf, email is the preferred method for submitting complaints, accounting for 16 complaints (55%). This is followed by six complaints received through the website (webform) (21%), four by telephone (14%), two through in person reporting (7%) and one complaint submitted via letter (3%).

7.2.2 This data indicates that a significant majority of complainants (79%) prefer to submit their complaints in writing rather than verbally interacting with the Service, such as by telephone or in person. There are several reasons for this preference. For instance, the Service's website, and designated email address for compliments and complaints make it quick and easy for complainants to submit their concerns. Additionally, complaints submitted via email, webform or letter can be sent at any time which is convenient for the complainant and attachments such as photographs can be included in emails.

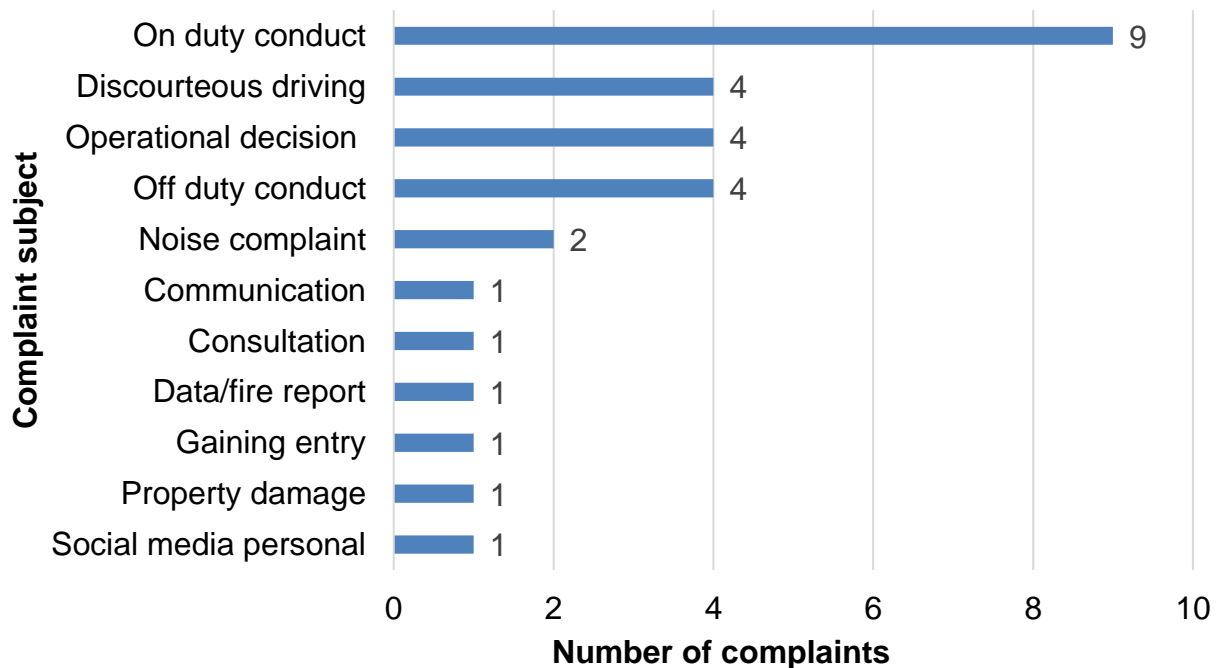
Figure 3: Complaints received by method of contact
from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025



7.3 Complaint subject

7.3.1 As part of its monitoring and handling process, the Service categorises complaints based on subject matter. Figure 4 outlines the 11 categories by which the complaints received during 2024/2025 have been classified.

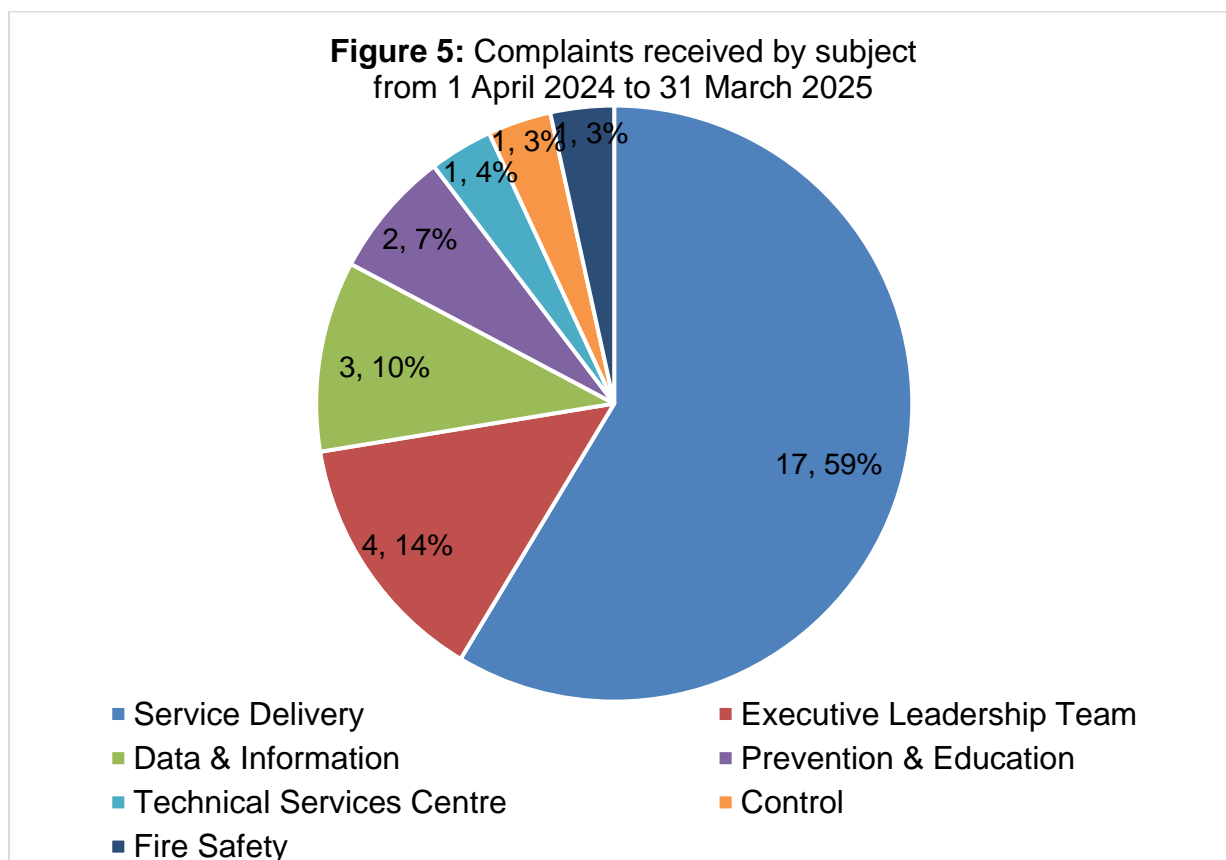
Figure 4: Complaints received by subject
from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025



- 7.3.2 The highest number of complaints relate to on duty conduct, accounting for nine complaints (31%) out of a total of 29 complaints. This represents a decrease from 15 complaints (39%) regarding on duty conduct reported in 2023/2024.
- 7.3.3 The second highest category of complaints involved discourteous driving, operational decisions and off duty conduct, with four complaints each, making up 42% of the total (14% each). Discourteous driving complaints have increased by 50% rising from two in 2023/2024 to four in 2024/2025. Complaints about off duty conduct remained unchanged at four, while complaints about operational decisions increased by one compared to three the previous year.
- 7.3.4 Noise complaints totalled two, consistent with the figures from 2023/2024, where the same number was recorded. Overall, the remaining complaint categories showed lower numbers when compared to the previous year.

7.4 Complaint by department

- 7.4.1 Figure 5 displays the number and percentage of complaints received by department during 2024/2025.



- 7.4.2 A total of 17 out of the 29 complaints were attributed to the Service Delivery department. As the largest department within the Service, with the most public contact, it is reasonable to expect this department would receive a high proportion of complaints, which equates to 0.09% when compared with the 17,628 incidents attended. Nine out of the 17 (53%) complaints were upheld.
- 7.4.3 The Executive Leadership Team received the second highest number of complaints, totalling four, which is one complaint more than they received in 2023/2024. Three of the four complaints were about an operational matter in which three residents expressed

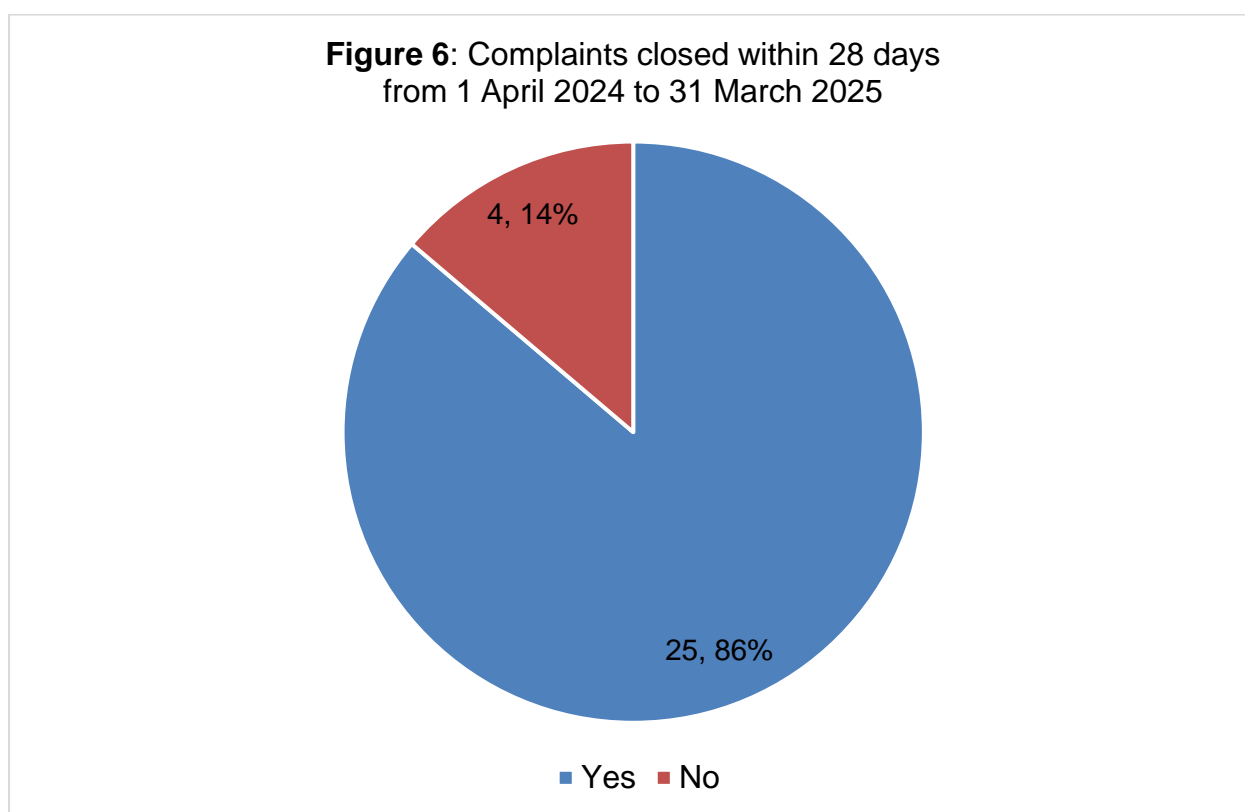
dissatisfaction, while the fourth complaint pertained to a consultation matter. None of the complaints were fully or partly upheld.

- 7.4.4 The Data and Information team received three complaints, which is an increase of two from the previous year. Two out of the three complaints (66%) were upheld. The Prevention and Education team received two complaints, which is four less than the number received in 2023/2024. None of these complaints were upheld. The other departments received one complaint each, none of these complaints were upheld.

7.5 Complaint performance against timescale

Stage 1 complaints

- 7.5.1 Figure 6 shows the number and percentage of complaints closed within 28 days. Of the 29 complaints investigated by the Service, 25 (86%) were investigated, closed and responded to within 28 days. The remaining four complaints (14%) required additional time to investigate. All complainants were notified of the extension and provided with a new deadline.



- 7.5.2 From the receipt of a complaint, the investigating officer has 28 days to investigate and provide a response. Section 10.2 elaborates on the Service's deadlines and explains why this timeframe differs from the 10 working days recommended by the Ombudsman.

Stage 2 complaints

- 7.5.3 During 2024/2025, one complaint was escalated to Stage 2. The CFO reviewed the matter and upheld the original complaint outcome. The number of Stage 2 complaints remained consistent with those received in 2023/2024.

7.5.4 The Ombudsman recommends that a Stage 2 response be issued within 20 working days; however, the Service's target is set at 28 days. The Stage 2 complaint was responded to within 14 days (10 working days).

7.6 Complaint outcomes

7.6.1 Table 2 categorises the complaints received by subject and outcome. For a complaint to be upheld or partly upheld, the Service or an employee must be found to be at fault for not adhering to guidance or procedure.

Table 2: Complaints by subject and outcome 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Complaint subject	Total	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld
On duty conduct	9	1	2	6
Off duty conduct	4	2		2
Operational decision	4			4
Discourteous driving	4	1	1	2
Noise complaint	2	1		1
Communication	1	1		
Consultation	1			1
Data/fire report	1			1
Property damage	1	1		
Gaining entry	1			1
Social media personal	1	1		
Total	29	8	3	18

7.6.2 Of the 29 complaints, 18 (62%) were not upheld, 8 (28%) were fully upheld and 3 (10%) were partly upheld. In total, 38% of complaints were upheld either fully or in part, which is a 7% reduction from 2023/2024, where 17 (45%) of complaints were fully or partly upheld.

7.6.3 The largest number of complaints concerned on duty conduct, with nine complaints received. However, only 33% of these complaints were fully or partly upheld, which is consistent with the percentage from 2023/2024, where five out of the 15 complaints (33%) were fully or partly upheld. Two of the four complaints regarding off duty conduct were upheld (50%), representing a 25% reduction from the previous years' figure, where three of the four (75%) were upheld. None of the complaints related to operational decisions, consultation, data/fire report or gaining entry were upheld.

8. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

8.1 Complainants can request an independent review of their complaint by the Ombudsman and in 2024/2025, one complaint was referred to the Ombudsman in January 2025.

8.2 After initial enquiries, the complaint was closed. The Ombudsman advised that they would *'not investigate this complaint about the conduct of an officer working for the Authority, driving a service motor vehicle. There is no worthwhile outcome achievable by us investigating.'*

8.3 The Ombudsman's decisions are published on their website at www.lgo.org.uk/decisions.

9. Learning from complaints

- 9.1 Understanding the cause of a complaint is essential for identifying areas where the Service may require improvement. Information about compliments and complaints is published monthly, internally on the Service's intranet and reported quarterly to the Internal Governance Board.
- 9.2 As mentioned in section 7.6.2, nine out of the 29 complaints (31%) were fully or partly upheld. On the whole, most complaints that were upheld, the remedial actions were individualised and involved employees undertaking additional training, engaging in reflective learning or a debrief or the review a policy or procedure.
- 9.3 During the year, there were two developments which were influenced by complaints. The first was the establishment of the Driver Standards Panel, which reviews driving complaints to analyse the circumstances and causes of work-related vehicle accidents, particularly where driver error is identified as a factor. The panel examines all relevant information, including health and safety declarations, and utilises an evaluation matrix to assess deviations from protocols and the severity of incidents.
- 9.4 Furthermore, some investigations found that employees had not switched on or worn their Body-Worn Video Cameras (BWVC). These cameras are a crucial source of evidence in investigations. A bulletin was published using anonymised complaint data to emphasise the importance and advantages of using this equipment. Investigations have shown that wearing and activating BWVC can provide immediate and factual account of events, supporting a fair and efficient review. This practice not only aids investigations but also protects employees from false or misleading allegations, ultimately strengthening public trust and reinforcing the professionalism of our employees.

10. Training and developments during 2024/2025

10.1 Employee training

- 10.1.1 A designated module on compliment and complaint handling has been integrated into the Service's supervisory management development pathway course. During 2024/2025, seven sessions were held, training 71 employees on the internal processes for managing compliments and complaints. This training equips employees with a better understanding of their roles in the compliment and complaint process.
- 10.1.2 In November 2024, 18 employees participated in Effective Complaint Handling training provided by the Ombudsman. This course offers an overview of best practices for accepting, investigating and resolving complaints effectively. Since May 2021, a total of 153 employees, including members of the Executive Leadership Team, have participated in this training. This ongoing programme ensures that employees in specific roles are trained as investigators.

10.2 Complaint Handling Code 2024

- 10.2.1 Following the publication of the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (the Code), the Service conducted a self-assessment against the Code in August 2024. The Service's compliment and complaint policy and procedure were combined into a single document, and minor refinements were made. The updated policy and procedure were approved by the Executive Leadership Team and published in December 2024.

10.2.2 The Code clarifies the definition of a complaint, how complaints can be made, the process be followed and the governance structure around complaints. The Service aligned with the Code however, there are a few deviations noted below, along with explanations for these choices:

- The Code specifies timescales in working days, while the Service has opted for calendar days. This decision was made because the Service operates 24/7 and complaint investigations continue throughout the weekend.
- According to the Code, complaints should be made within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue. Previously, the Service required complaints to be submitted within 30 days, but this timeframe has been extended to three months. The rationale for the shorter timeframe was that gathering evidence (such as CCTV, BWVC, Control Room calls, vehicle tracking information etc.) becomes more challenging when a complaint is raised a long time after the event. It should be noted that each complaint is evaluated on its merits, and the decision to investigate after the time limit will be considered.
- The Code states that a full response should be provided to the complainant within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. While frontline resolution complaints work to this timeframe, the Service has chosen to maintain a 28 day timescale for responding to formal investigation complaints. This extended timeframe allows for an extra week of flexibility to complete an investigation and respond to a complaint when compared with the requirements of the Code. The CFO and DCFO were hesitant to change the current timeframe, as the existing process is both effective and efficient. Additionally, there have been no complaints or negative feedback from complainants regarding response times.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 This report outlines the compliments and complaints received by the Service from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. It aims to assure the public, service users, partners and other stakeholders that the Service maintains a robust policy and procedure for managing compliments and complaints. During 2025/2026, the Service will continue to monitor and report on the compliments and complaints it receives and where appropriate, identify opportunities for learning and process improvements as necessary.