

## **Report of the Head of Legal Services**

### **8. Annual Complaints Update 2013/14**

#### **Purpose of report**

1. To update the Committee with regards to the process in place for dealing with compliments, complaints and concerns made by the public about the Service.
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#### **Recommendations**

*It is recommended that the Committee notes:*

- i) the process for dealing with compliments, complaints and concerns made by the public about the Service;*
- ii) that during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 a total of 30 complaints, 30 concerns and 93 compliments were received from the public; and*
- iii) that during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 none of the complainants appealed regarding the response provided and no complaints were sent to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation.*

#### **Introduction and Background**

2. It is important that the Authority has good corporate governance arrangements to ensure services are run in an open and accountable manner. The role of the Committee includes the monitoring and review of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements, which includes responsibility to consider the process with regards to compliments, complaints and concerns made by the public about the Service.
3. The mechanism for compliments, complaints and concerns plays an important role in the assurance process for Members, particularly in the following areas identified by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA):
  - a) Focusing on the purpose of the Authority and on outcomes for the community (which includes ensuring that effective mechanisms exist to monitor service delivery).
  - b) Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk (including putting in place effective transparent and accessible arrangements for dealing with complaints).

- c) Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

## **Current Process**

4. The Authority currently defines a complaint as 'any expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response', which may include the failure of the Authority to meet a required standard of service. A concern is defined as an expression of worry or interest, for example where a resident has noticed that a water hydrant is leaking. Occasionally a member of the public may raise a concern that is not within the remit of the Fire Authority. Such concerns are not included in the statistics but are passed on to the relevant organisation. The public may also wish to compliment the Authority on a particular aspect of the service that they felt was provided well.
5. The process for making a complaint, concern or a compliment is set out on the Authority's website and explains the process, which is:
  - A complaint can be made by telephone, by calling in person at any Station, by email or in writing. Complaints and concerns are acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt.
  - Complaints and concerns will be investigated and a response sent in writing within 10 working days from the date of the acknowledgement letter. A survey is also sent out with the response to establish whether the complainant was satisfied with the way their complaint or concern was handled.
  - Should a complainant be dissatisfied with the response, they can notify the Assistant Chief Fire Officer within 28 days. The complaint will then be referred to a Senior Officer who will conduct an independent assessment. The complainant will be informed of the outcome within 28 days or advised of any delay.
  - A complainant who is still dissatisfied with the response is entitled to send their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman
6. The number of complaints, concerns and compliments is regularly monitored, with monthly statistics being reported to Authority Members via the Members' Bulletin. The Senior Management Board receives quarterly reports to enable any common themes that may require service improvements to be highlighted. This annual report is presented to the Committee to provide the Authority with assurance that complaints and concerns are dealt with effectively and that where necessary improvements are made in service delivery.

## **Complaints, Concerns and Compliments Received in 2013/14**

7. During the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 a total of 30 complaints, 30 concerns and 93 compliments were received from the public. It should be noted that 16 of the concerns and one complaint received were regarding the responsibilities of other organisations, however officers responded to the issues raised.
8. With regards to the subject of the complaints received the only theme that emerged was the perceived driving standards of emergency vehicles, which comprised 21% of complaints about the Service. Common concerns from the public included poor fire safety at business premises and the potential lack of access to properties in an emergency.
9. The majority of complaints (20) found no error or fault by the Service and were dealt with by way of providing an explanation, however 6 complaints were upheld with 3 resulting in an apology and 3 leading to remedial action.
10. All complainants and those who sent in concerns were surveyed to establish whether they were satisfied with how their complaint was dealt with. A total of 18 people responded and all 18 respondents were satisfied with how their complaint or concern was dealt with. The majority of responses to complaints and concerns were met within the standard of ten working days. Two complaints and one concern did not meet this target as further investigation was required, however in these instances complainants were advised that more time was required.
11. During 2013/14 none of the complainants appealed to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer regarding dissatisfaction with the response provided and no complaints were sent to the Local Government Ombudsman.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

12. The role of the Audit and Standards Committee includes the monitoring and review of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements. This includes responsibility for considering the process with regards to compliments, complaints and concerns made by the public. The process is considered to be robust and fit for purpose. There have been no significant issues that have arisen and it has not been necessary to make any changes in Service delivery due to complaints or concerns received.

## Corporate Considerations

<b>Resource Implications</b> (identify any financial, legal, property or human resources issues)	The complaints, concerns and compliments process uses existing resources. No compensation payments have been required.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (identify how proposals link in with current priorities and policy framework and if they do not, identify any potential implications).	The complaints, concerns and compliments process links in with the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance.
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (identify any risks, the proposed control measures and risk evaluation scores).	Complaints, concerns and compliments are reported quarterly to the Senior Management Board where recurring themes are highlighted to provide an opportunity to consider service improvement where necessary. The Audit & Standards Committee receive an annual report to provide assurance to Members that the process is effective.
<b>Consultation</b> (identify any public or other consultation that has been carried out on this matter)	N/A – no policy change is recommended
<b>Equalities</b> (has an Equalities Impact Assessment been completed? If not, why not?)	N/A – no policy change is recommended

## Supporting Information

Background papers

CIPFA/SOLACE Framework

Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority Annual Governance Statement and Code of Corporate Governance

## Contact Officer

Alison Hughes, Corporate Support Manager  
(01905 368209)  
Email: [ahughes@hwfire.org.uk](mailto:ahughes@hwfire.org.uk)