

**ESSEX POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

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| Meeting | **Performance & Resources Board** | Agenda Item |  |
| Meeting Date | 30th October 2018 | Report Number |  |
| Report Author: | Tracy King, Darren Horsman, Colette Black |
| Presented By | Tracy King and Darren Horsman |
| Subject | **Complaints, Grievances and Whistleblowing**  |
| Type of Report: | Information |

# Recommendations

* 1. To note the contents of the paper.

# BACKGROUND

* 1. In the Police and Fire Commissioners Phase 1 plan under Cultural Change there were two actions 1 to review the Services Complaints and Grievance handling policy and another to implement an independent whistle blowing policy.
	2. It was acknowledged early on that both pieces of work were linked and should not be considered separately. It was also acknowledged that the Service wants to develop a transparent system where feedback provided by staff and the public is used more effectively to increase service performance.
	3. The Service has been criticised in the past for its lack of action following receipt of feedback. On some occasions not even acknowledging the receipt of the feedback, leaving staff and customers feeling that there is no point in providing feedback due to the lack of action. Feedback in which ever form it may take is one of the biggest opportunities that the Service has to learn and improve the quality of the service we deliver for both our staff and the communities that we serve.
	4. It is the preference of the Service for issues to be raised as soon as possible so that issues can be dealt with and addressed in a prompt, consistent, timely and appropriate manner which ensures that staff and customers have confidence in the process and consequently the Service.
	5. A robust thorough process for handling feedback that staff and customers can trust and have confidence in should lead to less formal complaints and whistleblowing cases. However the Service still needs rigorous complaints handling process and independent Whistle Blowing Policy.
	6. The Assistant Director of Performance and Business Planning took the lead on this piece of work supported by the Assistant Director of Communications and Public Engagement from the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Bernie Beckett Project Manager.
	7. At the beginning of the piece of work a workshop was held with key Senior Stakeholders to agree success criteria for the piece of work. Following the workshop success criteria were agreed and have been subject to further development from which the following list has been produced:-
* Increased staff confidence in feedback processes.
* Evidence is available to demonstrate that feedback is acted upon within agreed timescales and is dealt with consistent with policy and guidelines.
* A measurable increase in confidence in the independence and transparency related to decision making.
* Lessons learned are published and contribute to our journey of continuous improvement.
* The development and publication of an umbrella document that clearly signposts employees and members of the public to all feedback opportunities available to them
* The development and implementation of a process that enables visible, independent scrutiny of the process
	1. Following on from the initial workshop to agree success criteria a number of events and visits were planned to engage with our staff. The aim of these was to gain an understanding of staff experiences of providing feedback in the past had been, what channels they understood were available to them to raise feedback and what improvements they felt needed to be made that would ensure going forward they could have trust in the process and recognise the value that providing feedback has for the Service.
	2. Workshops were held at Your Voice and Managers Briefing, visits to Colchester, Leigh, Hawkwell and Halstead Fire Stations were also undertaken.
	3. A records of each event and visit were taken and on analysing these the following themes were detected and need to be considered/addressed in our future approach:-

**Engagement Outcome**

* 1. The opportunity to talk with a cross section of staff from both on-call, whole-time and support services has been a valuable exercise. Each group of staff were open with their feedback and had valuable suggestions in relation to improvements they would like to see not only on informal and formal feedback (complaints, whistleblowing) but also matters that relate to this topic. There was a genuine desire from all staff to speak and be listened to, whilst they were less concerned with the action that happened as a result of speaking out there is a real need for acknowledgement and response to the valuable input that our staff give freely.

**What works well?**

* + Team discussions/debriefs and line management/Just talking/Station Managers
	+ Face to face interactions/1-2-1
	+ You said, we did
	+ Representative Bodies
	+ Grievance process
	+ Feedback from the communities e.g. thank you letters

**Suggestions for improvement**

* + More face to face interactions to build trust/less emails
	+ An external independent voice, a clear avenue to raise a concern/give feedback to a trusted external point of contact
	+ Transparency of the system
	+ Timely response/acknowledgement to feedback/consistency in approach
	+ Use employee network groups to source feedback (BME, LGBT and Asian network)
	+ Share debrief reports for all to see/access – learning library
	+ Early involvement for staff affected by change e/g/ Building works at Station, Fire Ground radios, Replacement Control System, New appliances. Encourage feedback from our skilled workforce.
	+ Mix of electronic communications and other methods.
	+ Ease to understand published “who to contact” guide signposting all staff to a person that deals with x.
	+ Feedback to crews on outcomes of incidents they have attended e.g. what happened to the casualty that we rescued?
	+ Improved communications to staff when off duty. Most operational staff cannot access work email when off duty. Texting?
	+ Increased awareness of the complaints and whistleblowing policy.
	+ Transparent communication of decisions and the reasons the decision was taken.

**Recommendations**

* 1. The resources required to undertake this work are identified and agreed by SLT.
	2. Liaise with the NFCC Central Programme Office to develop understanding of the work that is being undertaken with regard to professional standards. Ensure that the work undertaken in connection with this paper is cognizant of, and compatible with, the work that the NFCC intend to produce.
	3. Development of single feedback document which brings together and signposts to all relevant feedback policies and processes to make it easier for the public and staff to navigate the range of policies and for us to deal with feedback in the first instance rather than this always being escalated as a complaint.
	4. Review of Whistleblowing Policy and Complaints & Compliments Policy, The outcome of the policy review to include;-
		1. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to have a role in the appeals process for public complaints.
		2. The Service’s Monitoring Officer to be the point of contact within the whistleblowing policy.
		3. The revised complaints policy to incorporate process for complaints against the Chief Fire Officer, Police Fire and Crime Commissioner and Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
	5. The development of reporting process that provides opportunity for increased scrutiny and transparency of grievances, complaints and compliments. This will include the development of a quarterly oversight process where information is shared and discussed between the PFCC and the Service. This would be based around a quarterly complaints and grievance report where trends and issues could be seen and discussed. A public version of this report would be published on the PFCC website.
	6. Explore the potential for The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or a nominated representative to review all closed investigations of grievance claims in order to learn lessons to help process improvement.
	7. Develop a plan to for implementation of the recommendations which will include;-
		1. A timeline for employee engagement and Rep Body consultation.
		2. Sign off and publication of policies
		3. Promote new policies at events such as manager briefing, your voice and through management cascades.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

* 1. There are no financial implications attached to this paper.

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

* 1. The increased robust and transparent reporting and scrutiny of complaints and grievance processes should have a positive impact on equality and diversity as we will have greater insight into the treatment of all individuals going through these processes.

**WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT**

* 1. There will need to be consultation and engagement with representative bodies and staff. The approach and engagement schedule will be included within the plan of work.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

* 1. All relevant legislation will be considered during the development of the policies and guidance to ensure that the Service remains within the parameters of current guidance and legislation.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

* 1. This could have a positive implication for Health and Safety as it may encourage breaches or issues to be highlighted sooner.