

Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2017/18 to 2020/21

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Rod Hammerton
Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Simon Hardiman, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Corporate Services on 01743 260196.

1 Purpose of Report

This report advises Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2020/21, with comparisons to the previous three years.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the report.

3 Background

The Fire Authority's vision and strategic aims stress a commitment to providing high quality services to the community of Shropshire. The Service takes seriously both complaints and compliments made about the quality, nature or delivery of the services provided. Comments are also used to review the effectiveness of the provision of these services.

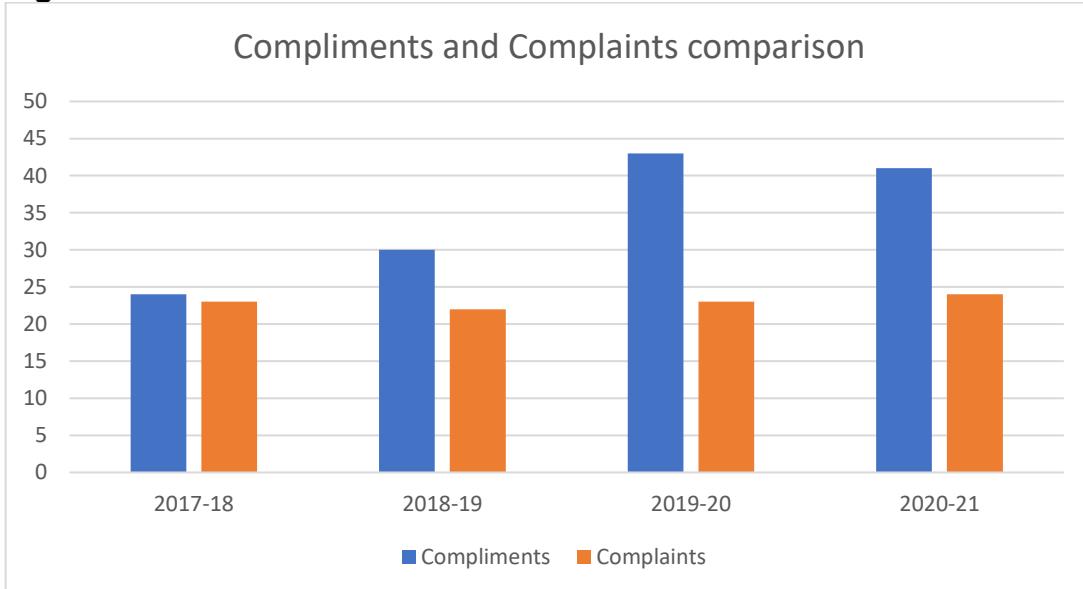
The Fire Authority has a Comments and Complaints Procedure in place to ensure complaints are handled in a fair and objective manner and that views expressed about the quality of services provided are acknowledged.

Compliments are recorded when they are addressed to the Chief Fire Officer or are brought to the attention of Executive Support Officers as per established process.

4 Summary of Compliments and Complaints received during 2017/18 to 2020/21

Figure 1 (below) illustrates the number of compliments and complaints received in 2020/21, compared with the previous three-year period.

Figure 1



Compliments

The details of all complimentary communications received via the Executive Support Officers are circulated to the personnel concerned, their line management and Executive Officers. Compliments are also published in the Service's weekly internal newsletter, 'The Pink', for all staff to appreciate and on the Service's website for public information. Care is taken at each stage, to ensure that any personal, identifying or sensitive details are removed.

The number of compliments received may be greater than shown in Figure 1, as this only captures those formally addressed to the Chief Fire Officer or passed to Executive Support. Compliments are often sent directly to stations, watches or departments and may not always be relayed to Executive Support Officers. However, work has been ongoing to raise awareness amongst staff to pass compliments to Executive Support and this may be a factor in the increased number of compliments recorded in the last two years.

The number and variety of compliments received make it difficult to benchmark specific areas of performance over a given period of time. However, Appendix A to the report provides a breakdown by type of the compliments received in 2020/21, together with some examples.

Complaints

Appendix B provides a breakdown of complaints received. There are no nationally prescribed classifications for recording complaints but, to facilitate local benchmarking across the period from 2017/18 to 2020/21, complaints received have been categorised into six key areas.

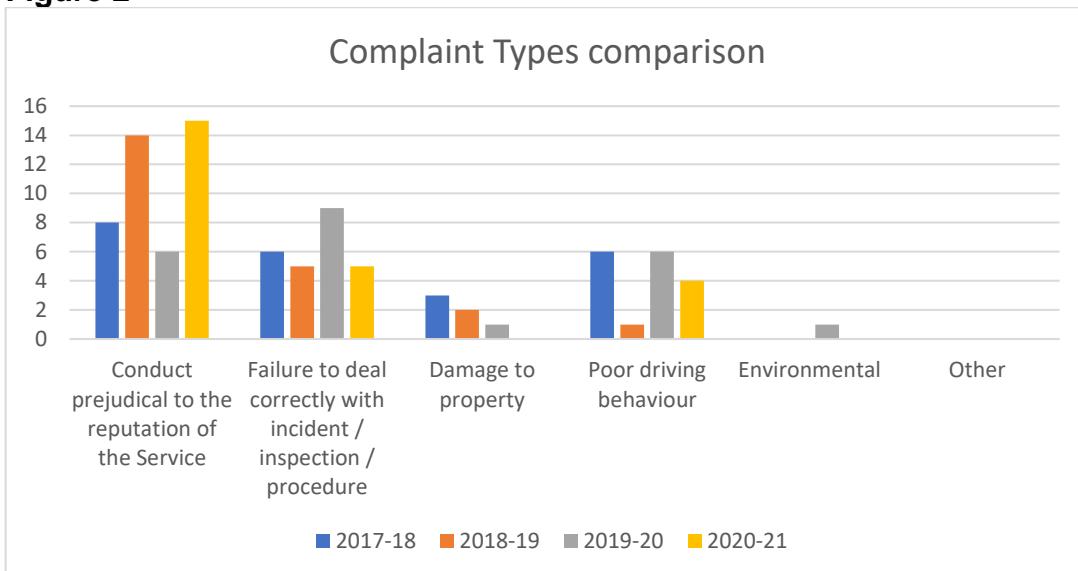
These are:

- Damage to property
- Poor driving behaviour
- Conduct prejudicial to the reputation of the Service
- Failure to deal correctly with an incident / inspection / procedure
- Environmental
- Other

Of the 24 complaints lodged during 2020/21:

- 15 related to 'conduct prejudicial to the reputation of the Service'
- 5 related to 'failure to deal correctly with an incident / inspection / procedure'
- 4 related to 'poor driving behaviour'

Figure 2

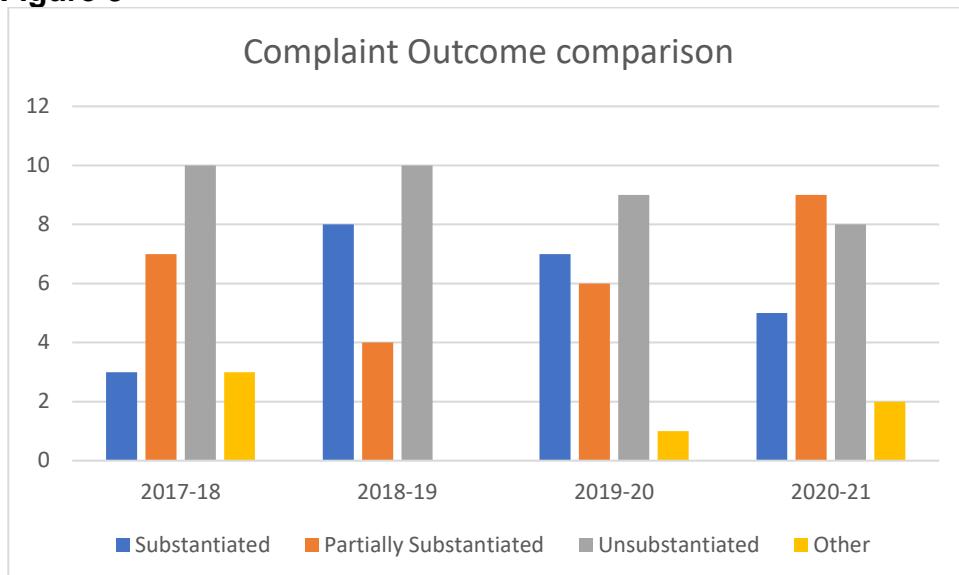


Six of the complaints received in 2020/21 were related to virus control restrictions. These constituted five of the complaints relating to 'conduct prejudicial to the reputation of the Service' of which one was substantiated and another partially substantiated. The other complaint referred to a procedural failure and was withdrawn when the complainant realised that they had not contacted the correct fire and rescue service.

Of the 24 complaints lodged during 2020/21:

- 5 were substantiated
- 9 were partially substantiated
- 8 were unsubstantiated
- 1 was withdrawn
- 1 investigation remains ongoing due to reasons outside the Service's control, which have been explained to the complainant.

58.3% of all complaints were found to be fully or partially substantiated (see Figure 3). This is a 1.8% increase over the previous year. This was the highest percentage of fully or partially substantiated cases over the four-year period, with 2017/18 the lowest at 43.5%. (Figures have been rounded up to one decimal point). However, please note the small sample size involved and the corresponding impact on the statistics of just one or two complaints.

Figure 3

The outcome category 'Other' refers to where the complaint was withdrawn or the outcome was not shared with Executive Support because the complaint was subsequently addressed through the Service's disciplinary procedure, and the outcome was confidential. As mentioned previously, in 2020/21 one complaint was withdrawn and another is ongoing due to circumstances outside of the Service's control.

In all cases, even those that were found to be unsubstantiated, the Service looks to identify any improvements that may help to avoid similar complaints arising in the future.

5 'Taster Day' Complaints

In 2020/21 the Service received a significant number of complaints as a result of its 'Taster Day' positive action initiative, targeted at black, Asian, minority ethnicities and women, held as a precursor to its wholetime recruitment campaign. A number of individuals contacted the Service because they considered this to be discriminatory.

Senior management decided that these complaints would be treated separately, outside of the standard complaints process. Each complainant's concerns were acknowledged, and each received an explanation concerning the Service's rationale, emphasising that this initiative was not part of the recruitment process and was lawful under the Equality Act 2010 under s158 and s159.

6 Management of Compliments and Complaints

Compliments addressed to the Chief Fire Officer are recorded by Executive Support and replied to by, or on behalf of, the Chief Fire Officer. Staff are encouraged to pass compliments to Executive Support, these are also acknowledged where contact details are available, and shared with the staff concerned and their line management. The Chief Fire Officer has now asked that compliments are also shared with Members as part of that circulation.

Complaints Performance Standard

Where contact details are provided, receipt of the complaint is formally acknowledged to complainants within five working days. All complaints are fully investigated irrespective of whether the complainant has identified themselves. Where possible, a written response is provided to complainants, advising of the outcome of the investigation. The Fire Authority sets a performance standard of 28 working days, in which to furnish the complainant with a written response or advise of an extension of time where necessary. This standard has consistently been achieved.

Appeals

Complainants dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation are entitled to appeal to the Chief Fire Officer within 28 days. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following this, an appeal may be directed to the Local Government Ombudsman.

During 2020/21 one formal appeal to the Chief Fire Officer was received. This concerned the visiting of an individual to a staff member's home during the initial pandemic lockdown to have their hair cut by the staff member's daughter. The complainant was advised that the original outcome was arrived at because the complaint was "*largely focused on the conduct of those who are essentially members of the public and the investigation did not find any compelling evidence of misconduct from one of our staff*". However, the complainant was advised that the Service had taken the opportunity to reiterate to staff the importance of adhering to Government guidelines on virus control and providing a leadership role within their communities.

No appeals against the outcome of a complaint have been made to the Local Government Ombudsman during 2020/21.

Lessons Learned

All lessons learned from complaints are communicated in the most appropriate manner to staff, with remedial action taken as necessary, e.g. retraining, discipline etc. Actions taken in relation to individuals are not published within this report, as that would not be appropriate.

7 Fire Alliance / Collaboration / Partnership Working

There are no opportunities for collaborative working at the current time. Both the compliments and complaints relate solely to the actions of the Service and its personnel and need treating with discretion.

8 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

9 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

10 Community Safety

Lessons learnt from complaint investigation outcomes are fed back into the Service to improve performance and therefore, where applicable, community safety. The compliments positively reflect the Service's impact on community safety.

11 Environmental

There were no complaints in 2020/21 regarding the Service's impact on the environment.

12 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An e-EQIA is not, therefore, required.

13 Health and Safety

Lessons learnt from complaint investigation outcomes are used to mitigate any health and safety impacts.

14 Human Rights (including Data Protection)

The data collected during the management of complaints and compliments is subject to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

15 ICT

There are no ICT impacts arising from this report.

16 Public Value / Service Delivery

There are no public value or service delivery impacts arising from this report.

17 Reputation

Lessons learnt from complaint investigation outcomes mitigate against any negative impact on the Service's reputation. The compliments positively reflect the Service's reputation within the community.

18 Training

There are no training impacts arising from this report. However, training to support awareness of the complaints process is planned for officers.

19 Appendices

Appendix A

Summary of Compliments received 2020/21

Appendix B

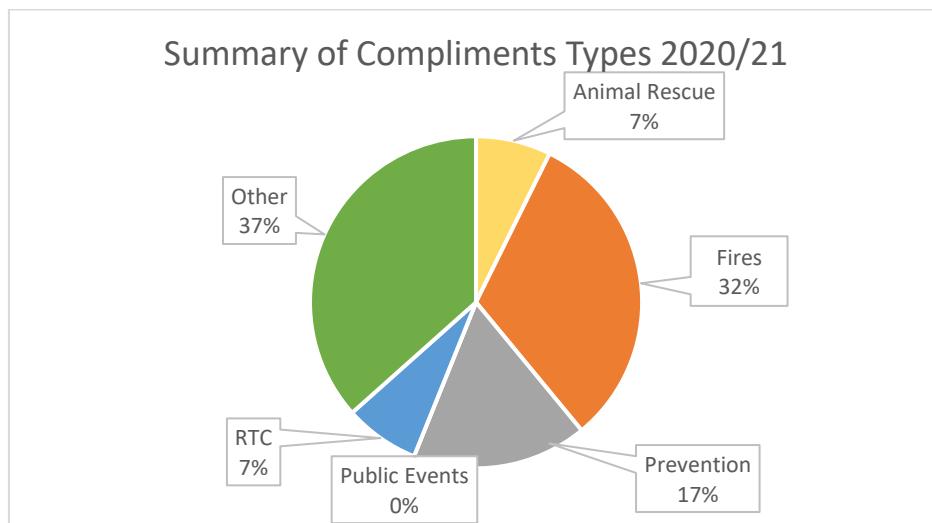
Summary of Complaints received between 2017/18 and 2020/21

20 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Summary of Compliments Received 2020/21

Figure 4



Examples of Compliments Received

Below are some examples of compliments received during 2020/21. More can be viewed on the Service website via the following link:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/management-support/compliments-and-thanks>

Compliment following Safe & Well Visit

We received a phone call from a gentleman who was very thankful for the visit, especially as he lives alone with no family around him. He said that the officer was extremely helpful and showed him how to test his smoke alarms going forward.

Thank you after rescue of trapped Labrador puppy 18 May 2020

After a successful resolution, the owner posted the following comment on Facebook. "The lady on the phone to me was fantastic. She kept me as calm as possible and talked me through getting an app on my phone (I am useless at this at the best of times) to help find our location. It was this help that led the crew to us. I truly thank all those involved in the rescue. We don't realise really how many wonderful people are involved in the work that you do. So thank you to all involved heroes on the scene and also behind the scene. We are so grateful. Thank you. Much love.

Thanks received following a barn fire on 18 May 2020

"I just wanted to pass on my enormous thanks and gratitude to everyone who helped last night. I cannot believe how quickly you got there, thanks to this and your brilliant work, you managed to save the building; so thank you very, very much. I am so sorry that you were there until 9.30pm and we left you there but thank you. I hope you all continue to stay safe particularly now in lockdown.

Thank you after a house fire on 23 May 2020

"We would like to send our thanks to everyone that helped save our house on Saturday. Our world has been turned upside down at the moment, but the professionalism and support of Shropshire Fire and Rescue both putting out the fire and checking through the night has been phenomenal. Again, thank you from all of us."

A thank you card was received at Craven Arms Fire Station following their participation with the Light Pumping Unit at an over-the-border barn fire.

"Dear Craven Arms Fire Crew

A huge 'thank you' for attending our fire last Friday night. Your High Volume Pump really was a game changer in containing the fire to one building. Thank you for crossing the border to come and help. Sincere thanks. Keep Safe".

Praise from West Mercia Police, Shropshire Youth Engagement Team

I would just like to say thank you to your team, I know from a professional point of view, that not very often do our office staff receive the praise they deserve. However, I can openly say that from the moment I sent in an email request to the Fire Service I have received an overwhelming response from your staff and I have been helped and assisted along the way. Big thanks to Fire Control for directing me to the Prevention Team Leader, with her vast knowledge and understanding of the situation. They are a credit to your organisation and I really appreciate all their efforts at this very difficult time.

A father's thanks for water rescue

"I would like to say thank from the bottom of our hearts to the teams from the 999 co-ordinators, the Fire and Rescue Service, the River Rescue Team and the Ambulance crew, who swiftly took control of a spiralling situation and saved our children from who knows what kind of an outcome. The professionalism and humility shown by all involved was second to none and we will always be grateful to all of you, so thank you. Everybody is fine now and looking forward to a week in Devon where we will do our utmost to stay out of trouble I promise. Thank you again and I hope you and your families stay safe. Thank you all - you are a credit to us all. Love, best wishes and huge gratitude from both families."

Compliment from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service officer, following a house fire caused by lightning strike on 11 August 2020

I was on an incident last night in Staffordshire and Market Drayton attended on the initial 2 pump attendance. I have to say they did an amazing job. All the crews worked really hard to save the house, which they did with some success. They were a credit to Shropshire FRS. I passed my thanks on to the crew that night, but I would like to mention the attending Level 2 Incident Commander.

Compliment from a Cressage resident following fire on 26 November 2020

"My property was one of the bungalows that was damaged and my wife and I would like to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your extreme professionalism and courage in keeping the fire from causing more damage and more importantly keeping the residents of Cressage safe and healthy. As you can understand my wife and I are still in shock, and can't really believe it's really happened, but thanks to you and your colleagues we are here to enjoy Xmas with our families. I'm a Black Country bloke and all I can say is "God bless you all"

Appreciation from the Chief Operating Officer of The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust

"May I just thank you and your teams for the prompt and hugely valuable support for hospital staff yesterday and today during the adverse weather. Our staffing numbers have been impacted by Covid and other absence, and this was further compounded by the weather so every staff member counts! Just getting a few more staff into many of our departments is crucial at the moment, so many thanks for helping us"

Summary of Complaints received between 2017/18 and 2020/21

Type of Complaint	Total 2017/18	Outcomes		Total 2018/19	Outcomes		Total 2019/20	Outcomes		Total 2020/21	Outcomes	
Damage to property	3	0	Substantiated	2	2	Substantiated	1	0	Substantiated	0	0	Substantiated
		1	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated
		2	Unsubstantiated		0	Unsubstantiated		0	Unsubstantiated		0	Unsubstantiated
		0	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn		1	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn
Poor driving behaviour	6	0	Substantiated	1	0	Substantiated	6	4	Substantiated	4	1	Substantiated
		4	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		3	Partially substantiated
		2	Unsubstantiated		1	Unsubstantiated		2	Unsubstantiated		0	Unsubstantiated
		0	Withdrawn									
Conduct prejudicial to the reputation of the Service	8	2	Substantiated	14	5	Substantiated	6	2	Substantiated	15	3	Substantiated
		3	Partially substantiated		4	Partially substantiated		1	Partially substantiated		5	Partially substantiated
		3	Unsubstantiated		5	Unsubstantiated		3	Unsubstantiated		6	Unsubstantiated
		0	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn		1	Ongoing
Failure to deal correctly with an incident / inspection / procedure	6	2	Substantiated	5	1	Substantiated	9	1	Substantiated	5	1	Substantiated
		0	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		4	Partially substantiated		1	Partially substantiated
		4	Unsubstantiated		4	Unsubstantiated		4	Unsubstantiated		2	Unsubstantiated
		0	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn		0	Withdrawn		1	Withdrawn
Environmental	0	0	Substantiated	0	0	Substantiated	1	0	Substantiated	0	0	Substantiated
		0	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated		1	Partially substantiated		0	Partially substantiated
		0	Unsubstantiated									
		0	Withdrawn									
Anonymous		2			3			1			2	
Total		23			22			23			24	