



Tayside Fire and Rescue

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

On Station Matters

Complaints from Members of the Public and Outside Bodies

Summary

This document contains information on the procedures to be adopted if a complaint is received from a member of the public or an outside body. It has been amended to reflect a change of address for the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Policy Statement

Tayside Fire and Rescue's aim in dealing with all complaints should be to achieve a speedy and satisfactory outcome in order that, where there are justifiable grounds for complaint, the public image of the service is maintained and the person who has initiated the complaint is also satisfied with our response.

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to offer our organisation an opportunity to test the effectiveness of our internal Complaints Handling System against the following set of principles. These principles are applicable to an effective complaints' procedure.

Complaints system should:

- a Be easily **accessible** and well publicised.
- b Be **simple** to understand and use.
- c Allow **speedy** handling with established time limits for action and keep people informed of progress.
- d Ensure a full and **fair** investigation.
- e Respect people's desire for **confidentiality**.
- f Address all the points at issue and provide an **effective** response and appropriate redress.
- g Provide **information** to Management so that services can be improved.

Procedure (Schematic Layout – [Appendix 1](#))

Wherever possible and practicable, complaints will be dealt with quickly and effectively at the point of contact.

Complaints are often made in the heat of the moment when individuals are emotionally involved. Effective handling is crucial to resolve as many complaints as possible at this early stage. This should be achieved by a conciliatory discussion and an explanation of Tayside Fire and Rescue Procedures. Where it is thought that Heads of Department should be notified of the circumstances, then an explanatory email message should be forwarded.

Where the complainant is still aggrieved, then they should be offered the facility of writing formally to the Chief Fire Officer. In such circumstances Heads of Department should be informed immediately by email.

Upon receipt of a formal complaint, whether written or verbal, Heads of Department will send a written acknowledgement to the complainant within two working days (see [Appendix II](#)). [Form M/22](#) should then be initiated and a suitable Manager appointed to research the complaint. This Manager, having discussed the complaint with the complainant, will then report back to Head of Department as soon as possible and, in any case, not more than seven working days stating what action has taken place.

Heads of Department should then ensure a substantive response is forwarded to the complainant within a further seven working days. If the enquiry cannot be concluded within this time span, then the complainant should receive written confirmation of this and an explanation of the circumstances.

On concluding the complaint, the Complaints Form and all relevant correspondence should be forwarded to the Administration Co-ordinator at Fire and Rescue Headquarters for registration.

Heads of Department shall keep the Chief Fire Officer/Deputy Chief Fire Officer fully informed of any complaints being dealt with as appropriate.

Where Heads of Departments consider it necessary, follow up contact should be established with the complainant to determine satisfaction or feedback as appropriate.

All personnel involved in an investigation of a complaint must ensure that confidentiality is of primary importance.

If after the complainant has gone through the complaints procedure and they are still dissatisfied, they have the right to take their complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. Generally they must contact the Ombudsman within a year of when the matter complained about happened or from when Tayside Fire and Rescue found out about it. If the complainant has first contacted the Ombudsman before the Brigade, it is likely the Ombudsman will refer the complainant to either the Fire and Rescue Board or Tayside Fire and Rescue.

Where it is apparent, on conclusion of investigation, that a complaint is likely to be the subject of litigation or an insurance claim, the complainant should be informed (see [Appendix III](#)) and the relevant correspondence forwarded to the Fire and Rescue Board Solicitor or Insurers as appropriate. The letter should make no reference to the question of liability.

As part of monitoring, the Head of Personnel Services will be responsible for collation of reports and examination of trends which may warrant amendment of Tayside Fire and Rescue policy and/or practice.

NB

Correspondence received from MPs, MSPs, Candidates for Local and Parliamentary Elections, District Councillors, Community Councils and School Boards will be handled by Heads of Department in accordance with Tayside Fire and Rescue Board's Policy Guidelines. Answers to questions from Councillors will, in the first instance, be referred to the Chief Fire Officer before replying.

Guidance for Dealing with a Complaint

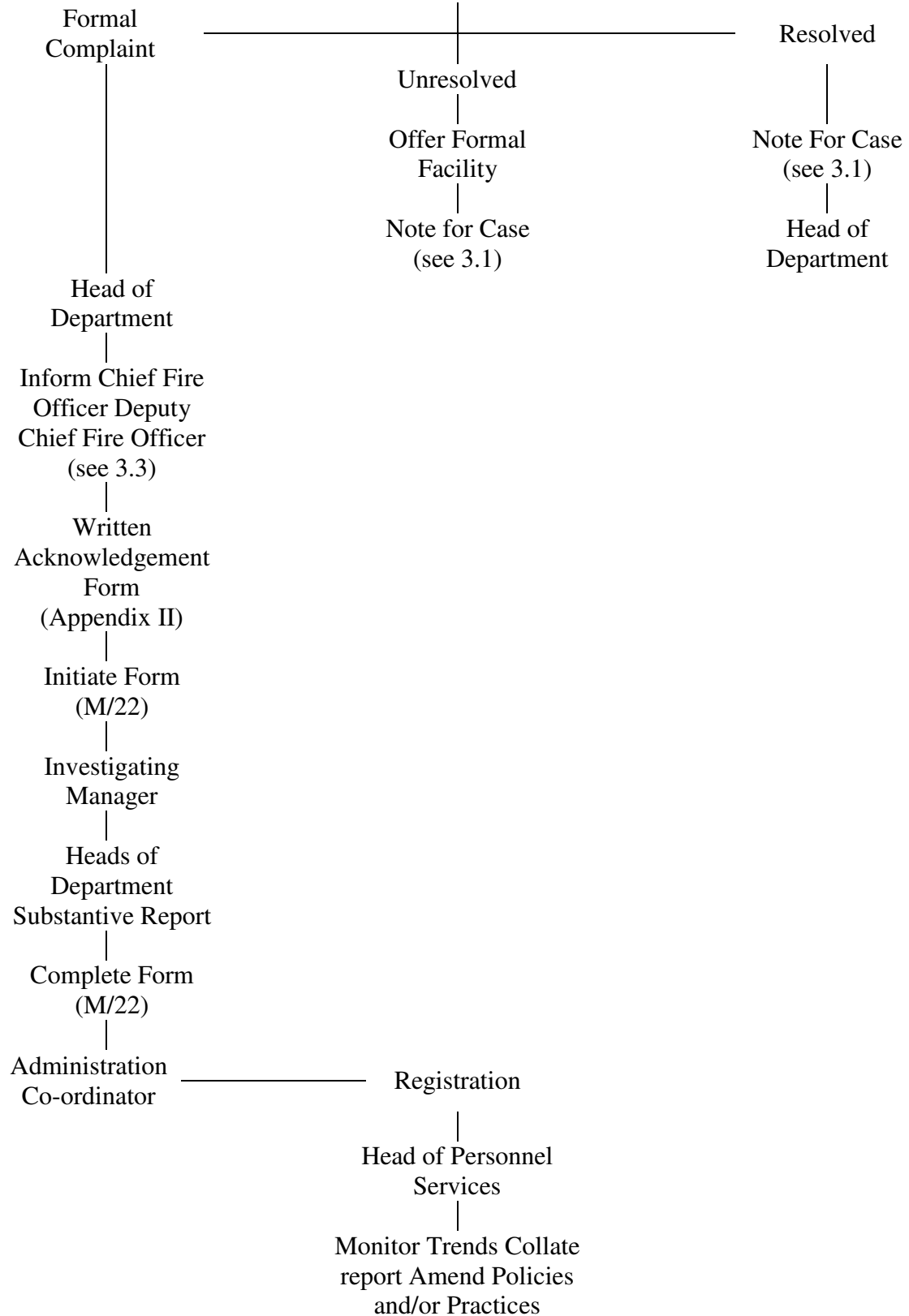
BE PROMPT	Delay will only aggravate the complaint
BE COURTEOUS	A polite and tactful response will help to reduce any friction which may exist between the organisation and the complainant
BE INFORMATIVE	Explain the reasons for a particular course of action or decision.
BE CLEAR	Do not obscure the issue by including unnecessary legal or technical jargon.
BE HELPFUL	Offer further advice where this is warranted.
BE FIRM	Do not be deterred from stating unpleasant facts or conclusions (BUT BE TACTFUL).
BE CORPORATE	Discuss the proposed reply with those affected if it may appear necessary to find fault with Tayside Fire and Rescue Board Policy or the actions of other departments.
BE ACCURATE	Make sure you answer the complaint and that any facts quoted are correct.

Above all remain calm whatever your personal feelings to the complaint being made or the attitude of the complainant.

Appendix I

SCHEMATIC LAYOUT

COMPLAINT PROCEDURE



Appendix II

Dear Sir/Madam

Complaints Procedure

I acknowledge receipt of your complaint dated _____ and can confirm that a Senior Manager within the organisation is currently investigating this matter. The result of this investigation will be forwarded, in detail, to yourself within the next 14 working days.

After you have gone through our complaints procedure, if you are still dissatisfied you have a right to take your complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7NS, phone: 0800 377 7330, fax: 0800 377 7331, email: ask@spsso.org.uk, website: www.spsso.org.uk. Generally if you want to do this, you must contact the Ombudsman within a year from when the matter complained of happened or from when you found out about it.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

Yours faithfully

S Hunter
Chief Fire Officer

Appendix III

Dear Sir/Madam

Complaint:

Further to my letter of _____ I write to advise you that details of your complaint have now been forwarded to the Tayside Fire and Rescue Board Solicitor/Insurance Section (delete where appropriate).

You should be hearing from this department in this respect in due course.

Yours faithfully

S Hunter
Chief Fire Officer