



Discipline and Complaints Effectiveness Assessment

2025/2026



Contents

» Contents	2
Discipline and Complaints Effectiveness Assessment 2025/26.....	3
Overview	3
Human Resources Role	3
Discipline	4
Reasons	6
Outcomes	8
Timescales	9
Appeals.....	9
Demographics	9
Training	11
Complaints	12
Reasons	14
Outcomes	15
Timescales	16
Demographics	16
Say So	20
Workforce Capacity.....	22
Continuous Improvement Initiatives 2025/26.....	22



Discipline and Complaints Effectiveness Assessment 2025/2026

Overview

This Discipline and Complaints Effectiveness Report provides a comprehensive overview of how RBFRS has managed, monitored and improved its approach to case management over the past year. It evaluates the effectiveness, consistency, and timeliness of disciplinary and complaints processes, ensuring they continue to align with organisational values, legal requirements, and best practice standards.

The report is intended to provide clear assurance that concerns are handled fairly, transparently, and proportionately, while also identifying key trends and any areas of risks. It draws on quantitative and qualitative data, case analysis, and stakeholder feedback to assess performance across key metrics such as case volumes, resolution times and outcomes.

This report also highlights areas of good practice, as well as challenges encountered, including any emerging themes that may require targeted intervention. Where appropriate, it sets out recommendations and actions which have been undertaken to enhance effectiveness, align to best practice and to ensure that we are continuously improving.

The Service introduced new values in 2025. The Safe, Supportive and Inclusive values were developed through extensive staff engagement, including leadership forums, surveys and staff sessions, which consistently identified these themes as most important to the workforce.

Therefore, throughout this report there will be analysis to understand where the introduction of the new values may have impacted case work activity in 2025/26. This evaluation is important in evidencing RBFRS' commitment to maintaining high standards of conduct, fostering trust, and ensuring that disciplinary and complaints processes contribute to the Service's Safe, Supportive and Inclusive values.

Human Resources Role

Human Resources (HR) plays a central role in ensuring the effectiveness, integrity, and continuous improvement of the organisation's disciplinary and complaints framework. HR is responsible for supporting and advising managers to apply policies consistently, fairly, and in line with organisational values and legal obligations.

Throughout the reporting period, HR has continued to provide guidance across all stages of the disciplinary and complaints process. This includes advising on case management, ensuring procedural compliance, supporting investigations, and



facilitating fair and proportionate outcomes. HR's involvement helps to mitigate risk, maintain consistency of decision-making, and safeguard both the organisation and its employees.

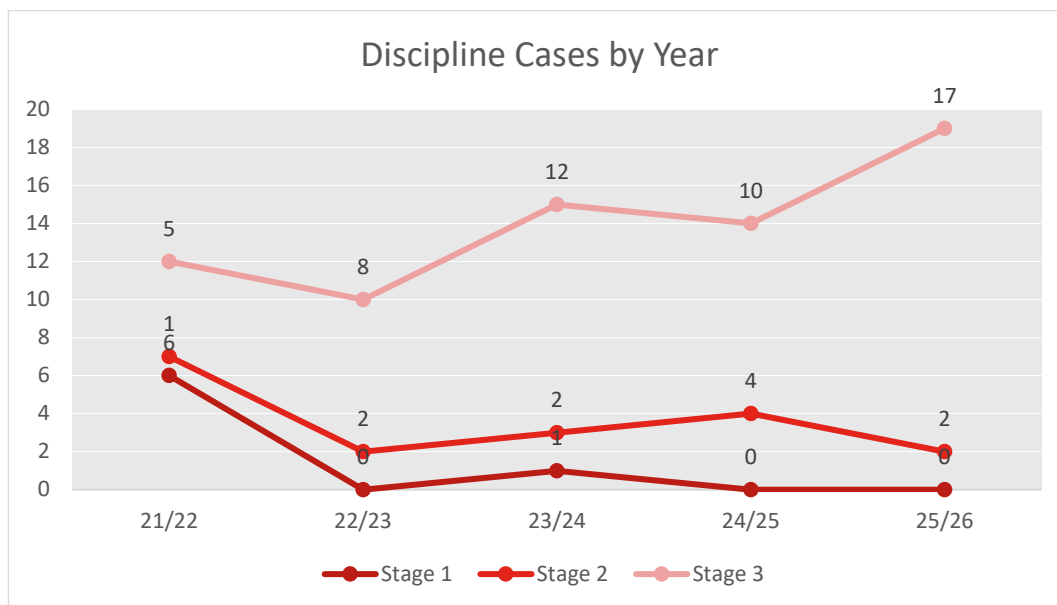
HR also plays a critical role in monitoring trends and identifying emerging themes across cases. Through regular analysis of data and case outcomes, HR is able to highlight systemic issues, inform policy development, and influence wider organisational initiatives related to culture, behaviour, and leadership. This insight is essential in moving from reactive case management to proactive organisational improvement.

In addition, HR is responsible for maintaining robust governance and assurance processes. This includes quality assuring cases, ensuring appropriate documentation and audit trails, and reviewing adherence to timescales and procedural standards. Where areas for improvement are identified, HR works collaboratively across the organisation to share and implement lessons learned.

Looking ahead, HR will continue to focus on enhancing the effectiveness of disciplinary and complaints processes by embedding best practice, further strengthening data insights and supporting staff to create a safe and inclusive environment.

Discipline

Yearly figures



Disciplinary case data for 2025/2026 indicates an overall increase in volume when compared with the previous year. Total cases rose from 14 in 2024/2025 to 19 in 2025/2026, representing a 36% increase.

Overall, 2025/2026 represents a higher volume for disciplinary case management,



driven primarily by increased activity in Quarter 3.

It is worth noting that in the recent staff survey conducted at the end of 2025/26, the question relating to 'behaviour of people at RBFRS mostly demonstrates our Behavioural Competency Framework' did not have a significant shift in score when compared to the 2023 staff survey.

While the increase in disciplinary case numbers may indicate emerging conduct or behavioural concerns, it may also reflect improved confidence in reporting and a strengthening organisational culture of accountability. This may be indicative of the early impact of the Service's Safe, Supportive and Inclusive values in promoting psychological safety and trust. This interpretation is supported by the 2025/26 staff survey results, where scores relating to whether behaviours at RBFRS demonstrate the Behavioural Competency Framework remained broadly stable when compared with the 2023 survey. Taken together, the data suggests that the rise in cases should be monitored closely but should not be viewed in isolation as evidence of a deterioration in organisational behaviour.

Quarterly figures

2024-2025			
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
1	7	2	4
2025-2026			
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
5	0	13	1

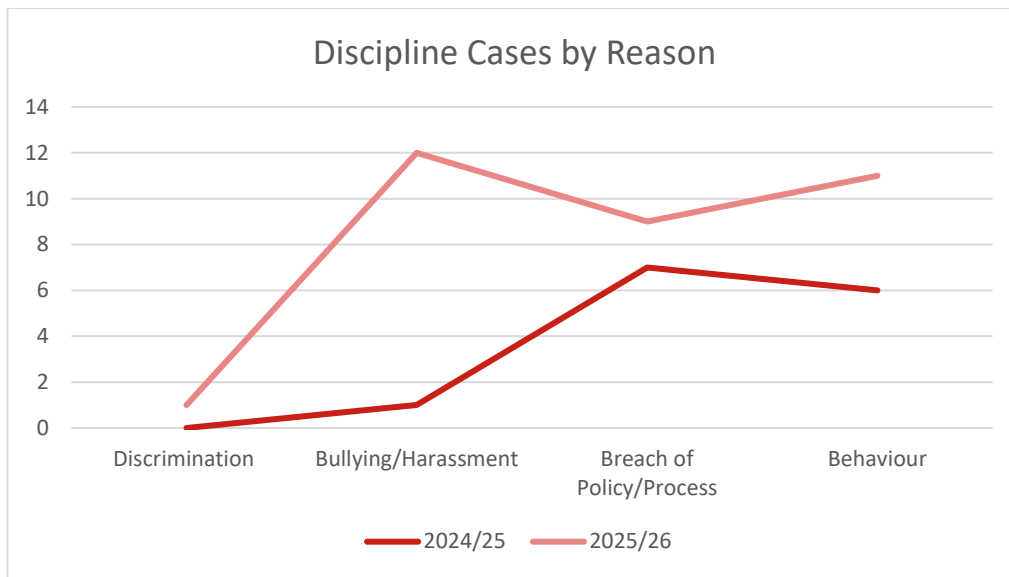


In summary, activity in 2024/2025 was relatively evenly distributed, with quarterly case volumes ranging from 1 to 7 cases. In contrast, 2025/2026 was characterised by a more uneven pattern, with no recorded cases in Quarter 2 and a significant concentration of activity in Quarter 3 (13 cases), compared to 2 cases in the same period in the previous year. This shift indicates a move towards more clustered case activity suggesting heightened reporting during specific periods. This may be reflective of the increased Service communication during December 2025. The Service released a joint statement with the FBU regarding Health, Safety and Wellbeing during the festive period, reminding staff of expectations in regard to values and behaviours and the expectation to maintain professionalism at all times, whether in the workplace or attending a work-related event.

Reasons

Disciplinary cases are investigated and heard under three stages of the Disciplinary Policy, depending on the severity of the allegations. HR monitors the stages disciplinary investigations are undertaken, to ensure action is proportionate and consistent to other investigations that have been undertaken historically.

2024-2025			
Discrimination	Bullying/Harassment	Policy/Process	Behaviour
0	1	7	6
2025-2026			
Discrimination	Bullying/Harassment	Policy/Process	Behaviour
1	11	2	5



When analysing the reason for disciplinary cases, the most significant change between 2024/25 and 2025/26 was in bullying and harassment which rose from 1 case in 2024/25 and 11 cases 2025/26.

This category accounted for 58% of all discipline cases in 2025/26, compared with 7% in 2024/25, indicating a substantial shift in the profile of cases. By contrast, breach of policy/process cases reduced from 7 to 2, a decrease of 71%, while behavior cases reduced slightly from 6 to 5, a decrease of 17%. Discrimination cases increased from 0 to 1; although the volume remains low, we will continue to monitor this increase.

Overall, the increase in discipline cases is being driven primarily by bullying and harassment, while behavior and procedural breach cases have remained stable or reduced. This points to a more concentrated risk profile, however this may be reflective of increased communication and preventative action as a Service following the amendment to the Worker Protection Act that came into force in October 2024, where employers must take all reasonable steps to prevent workplace harassment. These measures include; increased staff communication, the roll out of a LMS training package 'Understanding Sexual Harassment' and face to face mandatory 'In Their Shoes – Sexual Harassment Prevention' training at the beginning of 2025. This is supported by the 2025/26 staff survey results which saw a slight increase in score in relation to staff feeling able to openly challenge inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

This increase will be proactively monitored to ensure that any increase is reflective of increased confidence in reporting matters, rather than a deterioration of workplace culture in relation to bullying and harassment.



Outcomes

Investigation outcomes (including any subsequent hearings) are determined on a case-by-case basis, based on their individual merits, which can make direct comparisons challenging. However, as with decisions regarding the appropriate stage of an investigation, once a Hearing Officer has reached a conclusion or determined a sanction based on the available evidence, the assigned HR Adviser can draw on precedent from previous cases recorded within the central case management system to provide appropriate guidance and support to inform decision-making.

2024-2025			
Total Cases	Gross Misconduct	Progressed to Hearing	Awarded Sanction
14	9	9	5
2025-2026			
Total Cases	Gross Misconduct	Progressed to Hearing	Awarded Sanction
19	17	14	11

Analysis of discipline case outcomes shows that the total number of cases increased from 14 in 2024/25 to 19 in 2025/26, representing a rise of 5 cases or 36%. Within this, cases categorised as gross misconduct increased from 9 to 17, an increase of 89%, meaning that 90% of all discipline cases in 2025/26 were recorded as gross misconduct compared with 64% in 2024/25. Cases progressed to hearing also rose from 9 to 14, an increase of 56%, while sanctions awarded increased from 5 to 11, more than doubling year on year with an increase of 120%. This is consistent with the higher volume of cases overall, but also representative of a greater proportion progressing into more serious formal stage of the disciplinary process.



Timescales

Disciplinary investigations should be completed in a timely manner as outlined in RBFRS policy. During 2024/2025 one investigation was completed within 28 days, in comparison two were completed within 28 days in 2025/2026. A further two were completed within just over four weeks, a further four were completed in between six-seven weeks and the other five took over eight weeks with one taking over 17 weeks to complete. Delays have been for a variety of reasons including the complexity of the investigation, further allegations requiring additional investigation, availability of the employee / witnesses, annual leave of Investigating Officers and the co-ordination of shift patterns. At all stages, the importance of conducting investigations both promptly and thoroughly is emphasised. Investigation timescales will therefore continue to be closely monitored.

Appeals

The grounds for appeal include a defect of process, the issue not being proven on the balance of probabilities, the sanction awarded being too severe or new evidence coming to light since the disciplinary hearing.

Appeals are considered on the merits of each case. Where a defect in process is identified, appropriate feedback is given to those involved in the case, and process/policy reviews are undertaken to ensure any learning is incorporated into future.

In 2024/2025 of the cases that were concluded by 31 March 2025, one resulted in an appeal, which wasn't upheld. Of the cases not concluded by 31 March 2025, there was a further appeal, which was also not upheld. Of the cases concluded by 31 March 2026, four cases resulted in an appeal, three were not upheld, one outcome was changed from a summary dismissal to dismissal with notice. While this may be indicative of the increase in cases, it is worth noting that the percentage of appeals in 2024/25 was 14% of cases and in 2025/26 is 21% of cases, which is a notable increase. This will continue to be monitored as significant increase year on year has an impact on resource and capacity.

Overall, the fact that the majority of appeals were not upheld provides assurance that initial disciplinary hearings are robust and both procedural application and decision making are sound. The limited variation at appeal stage further demonstrates that the appeals process is operating effectively as a safeguard, ensuring that outcomes remain proportionate and appropriate where refinement is required.

Demographics

Data relating to gender, ethnicity and length of service is routinely collected for all



disciplinary cases and triangulated with organisational data, including the employee's station, department, watch and team. This triangulation of data allows the HR Team to gain a holistic picture and in turn identify and analyse any emerging trends across the organisation.

Length of Service

In 2025/2026, 26% of cases involved employees with five years' service or less, representing a slight decrease from 28% in 2024/2025. Within this cohort, 50% of cases related to breaches of policy or process. As part of business as usual activity we continue to review and strengthen onboarding, ensuring there is appropriate reinforcement of expected standards throughout materials and delivery.

Employees with fifteen years' service or more accounted for 42% of cases, compared with 57% in 2024/2025. However, this reduction reflects increased overall case volumes rather than a material decrease in actual numbers. Notably, 62% of cases within this group related to bullying and harassment. This aligns with the overall increase in such cases during 2025/2026. The rise in reported cases in this category is likely to reflect improved awareness and confidence in reporting, as outlined in the reasoning section above.

Gender

In 2025/2026, 95% of cases involved male employees, an increase from 78% in 2024/2025. This broadly reflects workforce composition (72.1% male as of 31 March 2025).

Ethnicity

In 2025/2026, 95% of cases involved employees identifying as White British, a slight decrease from 100% in 2024/2025. This remains broadly aligned with workforce demographics (82% White British). Whilst no disproportionality is immediately evident, continued monitoring remains important to ensure there are no barriers to reporting or unintended biases within processes.

Location

In 2025/2026, analysis of case distribution by location did not identify any consistent or systemic trends across specific stations or departments. Instances of multiple cases within individual locations were attributable to isolated circumstances rather than indicative of wider cultural concerns. This suggests that issues are not location-specific but are more closely linked to individual behaviours or case-specific factors. Ongoing monitoring will continue to ensure that any emerging location-based patterns are identified at an early stage and addressed appropriately.



Training

The HMICFRS culture report recommends that all Services ensure those carrying out investigations receive appropriate training. Managers are supported in managing performance of their staff through a variety of core skills courses. The new managers induction checklist that was created in 2024/25, is now fully embedded across the Service and is supporting new managers to address any development needs, highlighting required courses and where they can find supporting manager guidance and HR toolkits. In quarter one of 2025/26 following the publication of a new Culture Plan, an updated Behavioural Competency Framework (BCF) was published. To assist staff with understanding the new framework, twelve awareness sessions were offered via Microsoft Teams. An updated BCF eLearning package also went live to support further understanding.

At RBFRS, new managers on a Development and Assessment Pathway (DAP) are required to undertake either an Initial, Intermediate or Advanced Investigation and Hearings course as part of their development pathway to gain competence.

The aim of these courses is to upskill staff to undertake fair and reasonable disciplinary investigations and give them the knowledge and awareness of the importance of dealing with behavioural or conduct issues at the early stages. While they are not required to as part of a DAP, Green Book staff also attend the courses.

In 2025/26 RBFRS rolled out an Investigation and Hearings refresher course. The refresher training enables attendees to confidentially share their experiences / learning in regard to investigations and hearings and will be supported with case studies that capture learning from real experience designed by HR to aide ongoing learning.

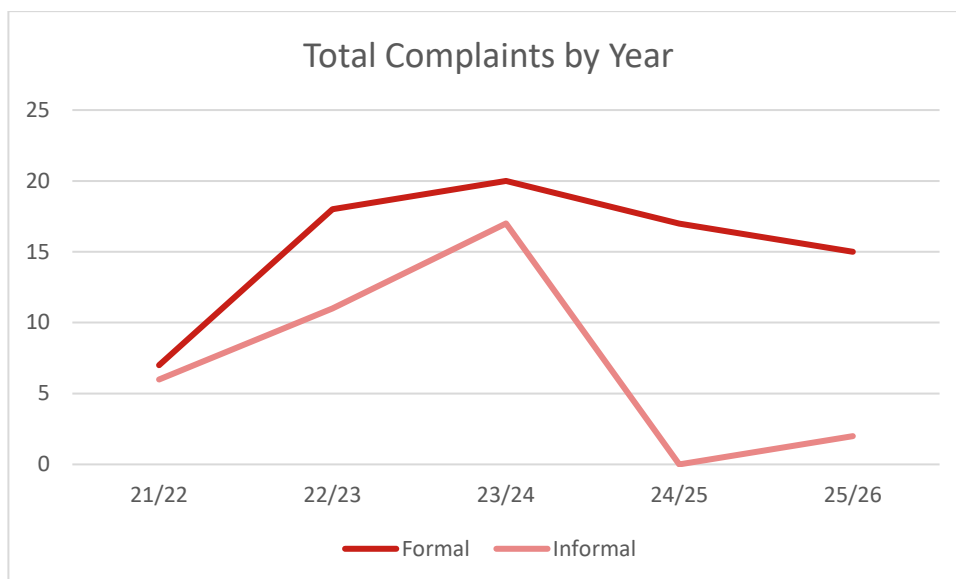
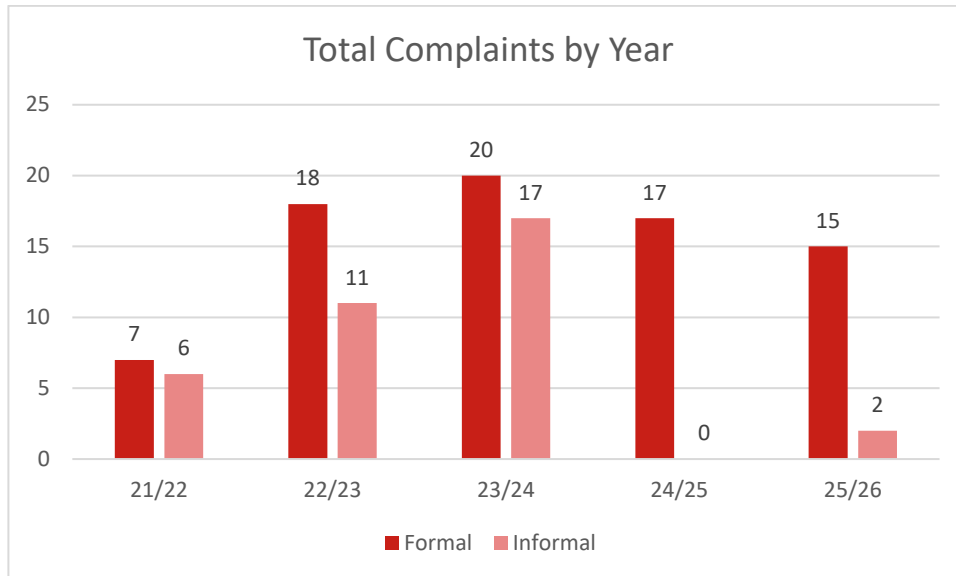
The HR team continue to gather feedback from courses and update training materials based on feedback and learning from any cases.



Complaints

Yearly figures

A summary of total complaints received over the past five years is set out below. Please note that from 2024/2025 onwards, a decision was taken to exclude anonymous complaints submitted via Say So from the overall complaint figures.





Quarterly figures

2024-2025			
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
2	9	4	2
2025-2026			
Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
4	4	6	3

In 2024/25, complaints rose from 2 in Quarter 1 to a peak of 9 in Quarter 2 before reducing to 4 in Quarter 3 and 2 in Quarter 4. In 2025/26, the pattern was more even at 4, 4, 6 and 3 respectively. This suggests a move towards greater stability year on year, although periodic increases remain and should continue to be monitored through reporting.



Reasons

2024-2025				
Discrimination	Bullying/Harassment	Policy/Process	Behaviour	
3	5	5	4	
2025-2026				
Discrimination	Bullying/Harassment	Policy/Process	Behaviour	Victimisation
2	9	3	1	2

Complaint rationale is routinely reviewed to identify any required amendments to policies or processes. Where themes or recommendations emerge such as the need for policy updates, clearer guidance on application, or improved communication of expected behaviours, these are considered and implemented as appropriate.

Overall complaint volumes remained stable year on year, with 17 complaints recorded in both 2024/25 and 2025/26. However, the profile of complaints changed. In 2024/25, the highest number of complaints related to bullying/harassment and policy/process issues, with 5 cases each, followed by behaviour with 4 and discrimination with 3. In 2025/26, bullying/harassment increased significantly to 9 cases, becoming the most prominent complaint type and accounting for over half of all complaints, while behaviour reduced from 4 cases to 1 and policy/process complaints reduced from 5 to 3. Discrimination complaints decreased slightly from 3 to 2, while victimisation emerged as a new category with two complaints.

In summary, while overall complaint volumes have not increased, the concentration of bullying/harassment cases in 2025/26 represents a notable change in complaint profile. As outlined in the previous discipline section, this is likely a reflection of Service increased communication and preventative action following the amendment to the Workers Protection Act in October 2024. However, this will continue to be closely



monitored.

Outcomes

2024-2025				
Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Other
6	5	2	1	1
2025-2026				
Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Withdrawn	Other
8	4	4	0	0

* note – the outcomes detail all complaints completed as at 31 March each year so the figures relating to outcomes may differ from the total number of complaints received.

The outcome of complaints are analysed. All decisions are case specific and made based on the balance of probability of the evidence for each particular cases. The reasons why cases are not upheld or partially upheld include lack of evidence, including where there is an absence of corroborating evidence. Where cases are upheld, this would include complaints that warrant further disciplinary action or where a policy or process needs changing to address the complaint. Other actions could include informal management action.

Three complaints were escalated for further investigation under the disciplinary policy.

Overall outcome trends have shifted, with cases not-upheld increasing from 6 to 8 and cases upheld rising from 2 to 4, while partially upheld cases reduced from 5 to 4. Withdrawn and other outcomes, which together accounted for 2 cases in 2024/25, were



not recorded in 2025/26.

Timescales

2024-2025	2025-2026
0%	18%
Completed within timescales	Completed within timescales

Delays in completing complaints within the 28-day timescale set out in the Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy were attributable to a range of factors, including staff availability and sickness, the time required to source external investigators, and in some cases, limited availability of complainants or their representatives. It is recognised in the Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy that more complex investigations, particularly those involving multiple witnesses and extensive evidence gathering may take up to 3 months to complete. In 2025/26 94% of investigations were completed within 3 months or less. When there are delays with investigations, staff (and their representatives) are contacted to ensure they are aware of the reasons for the delay and when the investigation is likely to conclude.

Demographics

Gender

Complaint Subjects

Gender	% of total complaints received 2024/2025	% of total complaints received 2025/2026
Male	53%	47%
Female	18%	29%
N/A*	29%	24%

* N/A – these complaints related to policy and process or were not attributed to a single



individual.

The complaint subject data provides a more even distribution across gender categories compared with the previous year. Complaints relating to males decreased from 53% in 2024/25 to 47% in 2025/26, although males remain the largest single category. Complaints relating to females increased from 18% to 29%, representing an 11% rise. Complaints recorded as N/A decreased from 29% to 24%, indicating a smaller proportion of complaints related to policy, process, or matters not attributed to a single individual.

Overall, the data suggests a slight shift away from male attributed and non-individual complaints towards a higher proportion of complaints relating to females in 2025/26. While male related complaints remain the most common category, the increase in female related complaints and continued high proportion of N/A complaints should be monitored to understand whether this reflects changes in reporting patterns, case types, or the nature of complaints being received.

Complainants

Gender	% of total complaints received 2024/2025	% of total complaints received 2025/2026
Male	76%	65%
Female	24%	29%
N/A*	0%	6%

* N/A – external complaints, or matters escalated by the Service

The complaints data shows a shift in the gender profile of individuals linked to complaints between 2024/25 and 2025/26. The proportion of complaints relating to males decreased from 76% to 65%, while complaints relating to females increased from 24% to 29%. In 2025/26, 6% of complaints were recorded as N/A, reflecting external complaints or matters escalated by the Service, whereas no complaints were recorded in this category in 2024/25.

Overall, males continue to account for the majority of complaints; however, the reduction in the male proportion and the increase across female and N/A categories indicate a broader distribution of complaint types in 2025/26. This will continue to be monitored to understand whether the shift reflects changes in complaint sources, reporting patterns, or underlying factors.



Ethnicity

Complaint Subject

Ethnicity	% of total complaints received 2024/2025	% of total complaints received 2025/2026
Ethnic Minority Group	0%	6%
White British	71%	65%
N/A*	29%	29%

* N/A – these complaints related to policy and process and were not attributed to a single individual.

The ethnicity data shows that the majority of complaints continue to relate to individuals recorded as White British, although this proportion decreased from 71% in 2024/25 to 65% in 2025/26. Complaints relating to individuals from an Ethnic Minority Group increased from 0% to 6%, while complaints recorded as N/A remained unchanged at 29% across both years.

Overall, the data indicates a small shift in complaint distribution by ethnicity in 2025/26, with a reduction in complaints relating to White British individuals and the introduction of complaints relating to individuals from an Ethnic Minority Group.

Complainant

Ethnicity	% of total complaints received 2024/2025	% of total complaints received 2025/2026
Ethnic Minority Group	6%	29%
White British	94%	59%
Prefer not to say	0%	6%



Not known* 0% 6%

The ethnicity profile of complainants shows a notable year-on-year change. Complaints from individuals recorded as being from an Ethnic Minority Group increased from 6% in 2024/25 to 29% in 2025/26, while complaints from White British individuals reduced from 94% to 59%. In 2025/26, 6% of complainants selected “Prefer not to say” and a further 6% were recorded as “Not known”, which limits the extent to which firm conclusions can be drawn. The increase in complaints from Ethnic Minority Group complainants may indicate improved confidence, awareness or accessibility of the complaints process; however, given the relatively small dataset, this will continue to be monitored over time alongside wider workforce and community representation data to identify whether the trend is sustained and whether any further action is required.

Location

Location	% of total complaints received 2024/2025	% of total complaints received 2025/2026
Hubs	71%	65%
HQ/Departments	23%	23%
TVFCS	6%	6%
Unknown*	0%	6%

Overall, the location profile is broadly stable in the year-on-year analysis. The data shows that complaints continue to be most commonly associated with Hubs, although their proportion of total complaints has reduced from 71% in 2024/25 to 65% in 2025/26. This suggests a slight shift away from Hubs as the dominant source/location of complaints, although they remain the largest category overall. HQ/Departments remained stable at 23% across both years, indicating no material change in the proportion of complaints linked to this area. TVFCS also remained unchanged at 6%, suggesting a consistent and relatively low proportion of complaints year on year.



Length of Service

The majority of the workforce falls within the 1 -10 years' and 11- 20 years' service groups. In 2025/2026, 59% of complaints were raised by employees with 1- 10 years' service, indicating that earlier-career staff are more likely to raise concerns.

Only one complaint was raised by an employee with less than one year's service in 2025/2026, however a further four complaints were raised by employees with less than two years' service. This suggests that expectations are being clearly established at the point of entry, supported by induction processes, including the provision of the Behavioural Competency Framework and Employee Code of Conduct. However, this cohort will continue to be monitored, as complaints involving new starters, either as complainants or subjects may indicate issues relating to recruitment messaging, cultural alignment, or the effectiveness of induction.

Employees with 20 or more years' service accounted for 18% of complaints in 2025/2026, with the majority relating to inappropriate behaviour, discrimination, or bullying and harassment. While this highlights a concentration of behavioural related concerns among longer serving staff, it is positive that individuals feel able to raise concerns irrespective of a colleague's tenure. This reflects a culture where inappropriate behaviours are increasingly challenged and reported, supporting transparency and accountability across the organisation.

Say So

Primary Reason	Total Complaints 2024/2025	Total Complaints 2025/2026
Equality	8	2
Management/Supervision	3	2
Abuse – emotional/psychological	6	0
Code of conduct	4	4
Health and Safety	3	1
Policy/process	3	1
Performance or Efficiency	0	1
Verbal Abuse	0	2



Abuse Alcohol and Substance	0	1
Abuse Sexual	0	3
Bribery or Corruption	0	1
Total	27	18

Overall, Say So complaints have reduced from 27 in 2024/25 to 18 in 2025/26, a decrease of 9 complaints. This represents a positive year-on-year reduction in overall anonymous complaint volumes.

Say So works with 14 Fire and Rescue Services and there were a total of 161 concerns, whilst we are unable to identify other services, we can see that some had 32 complaints while others had 1 complaint. However, there is no average across Fire and Rescue Services available.

The most significant reductions were seen in Equality complaints, which fell from 8 to 2, and Abuse – emotional/psychological, which reduced from 6 to 0. There were also smaller reductions in Management/Supervision complaints from 3 to 2, and both Health and Safety and Policy/process complaints from 3 to 1. Code of conduct complaints remained unchanged at 4 across both years. As overall complaint numbers have reduced, this category now represents a larger proportion of the total complaint profile in 2025/26 and remains a key area for continued monitoring.

Several new complaint categories emerged in 2025/26 where no cases were recorded in 2024/25, including Abuse Sexual (3), Verbal Abuse (2), Performance or Efficiency (1), Abuse Alcohol and Substance (1), and Bribery or Corruption (1). While numbers are low, these categories are significant due to the nature and potential seriousness of the issues raised and therefore this will continue to be monitored.

Overall, the trend indicates an improvement in total complaint volumes and reductions across several previously higher categories. However, the emergence of new, serious complaint types suggests that continued oversight, case review, and thematic learning remain important to ensure risks are understood and addressed effectively.

Compared with the overall 2025/26 complaint categories, the Say So data broadly aligns with wider trends, particularly around conduct-related concerns.

Bullying/Harassment was the largest overall complaint category in 2025/26, with 9 complaints. This is consistent with Say So themes, where Code of Conduct (4), Abuse Sexual (3) and Verbal Abuse (2) indicate that interpersonal behaviour remains a key area of concern.

Discrimination accounted for 2 complaints overall, matching the 2 Equality complaints recorded through Say So. Policy/Process complaints were higher overall (3) than



through Say So (1), suggesting some process-related concerns are raised through the formal complaint route.

Overall, the comparison shows that conduct, bullying/harassment and behaviour related concerns are the dominant themes in 2025/26. While Say So complaints have reduced, the wider complaints profile indicates that these areas remain the most prominent and should continue to be monitored through case review and thematic learning.

The decrease in anonymous reporting alongside an increase in formal complaints may reflect a positive cultural shift, with staff feeling more confident to raise concerns openly. This may be indicative of the early impact of the Service's Safe, Supportive and Inclusive values in promoting psychological safety and trust.

Workforce Capacity

From a capacity and service delivery perspective, the increase in case volume has implications for operational demand. Higher caseloads require greater input from investigating officers, hearing managers and HR advisers, reinforcing the importance of maintaining consistent processes, clear guidance, and appropriate support for managers.

A significant proportion of managers are currently in development roles and may therefore have limited experience of conducting investigations. This increases the level of support required from HR, impacting on the time needed to advise managers and creating additional pressure on capacity. This also presents a corporate risk in terms of balancing resource demand with the delivery of other key organisational objectives.

Cases are allocated on a rotational basis to avoid individuals managing multiple investigations concurrently. However, due to the sustained high volume of cases at RBFRS, many managers have undertaken several investigations and/or acted as Hearing Officers within the year.

To mitigate the impact on internal capacity, external investigators have been utilised. While effective in managing demand, this approach carries a financial implication for the Service, particularly in complex cases requiring extended input.

Continuous Improvement Initiatives 2025/26

The Service continues to undertake a programme of improvement to strengthen the management of misconduct, complaint handling, and professional standards. This work has been driven by:

- Internal evaluation and case learning



- Findings from internal and external audits
- Recommendations from HMICFRS, including the Standards of Behaviour Review
- Wider sector learning from Fire and Rescue Service cultural reviews, NJC circulars and best practice

All activity continues to be tracked and measured through the Service's Effective Grievance, Discipline and Performance Action Plan, ensuring oversight, accountability, and sustained improvement as part of business as usual.

Actions Taken

1. Enhancing Training and Capability

The Service has implemented a structured and responsive training approach to improve competence and consistency:

- We conducted an evaluation survey in August 2024 for those who attended Investigations and Hearings training to assess the effectiveness of the delivery and identify any potential gaps in learning. Findings were used to develop and introduce refresher training in 2025.
- We have fully embedded a new manager induction checklist, mandating required training and refresher learning to ensure managers are equipped to address conduct issues, including early informal resolution.
- We have delivered internal training for notetakers to ensure consistency and accuracy.

2. Strengthening Case Management and Governance

A range of tools, frameworks, and oversight mechanisms have been introduced to improve consistency, quality, and transparency:

- We continue to update our HR Adviser and Investigating Officer checklists to reflect learning from; case law, case reviews, cultural reviews and HMICFRS recommendations with a focus on the declaration of relationships within investigation processes and welfare considerations for all parties involved
- We have produced guidance documents for performance management, supporting earlier and more informal intervention.
- Following feedback and a review of the existing process, we have established clear governance for external investigators, including developing a terms of reference and a rules of engagement.
- We continue to use decision-making checklists for disciplinary hearings and appeals to ensure, consistency, transparency and a clear rationale for



outcomes and sanctions.

- We created a legitimate interest assessment to ensure that there is appropriate evaluation in place to assess the sharing of data where appropriate e.g. a safeguarding risk.
- We are finalising a HR People Insights page within the HR Team, which will hold all casework information and still maintain the same confidentiality controls. This will which create efficiencies and strengthen the way casework, recommendations, learning and wider cultural data are captured, monitored and reported. Moving from manual processes will reduce administrative burden and provide more timely oversight of activity and trends.

Collectively, these changes will provide a more holistic view of people data, enabling more effective cultural analysis, helping the organisation to identify themes earlier and supports organisational learning and continuous improvement.

- Following feedback on the timeliness and accuracy of meeting notes. We have conducted research and a review of transcription tools for discipline and complaint meetings. This is now reflected within the revised Disciplinary Policy. The Service hopes to roll this out by the end of August 2026. This will create efficiencies, both in the accuracy of notetaking and the timeliness of notes being produced
- We developed a case debrief form to support structured debriefs and ensure consistency of application following case conclusions. The purpose of these debriefs is to provide a clear and consistent framework for reflecting on each case, identifying lessons learned, and capturing opportunities to improve processes, guidance, and decision-making. This supports continuous improvement and supports organisational learning by highlighting themes such as investigation quality, timeliness and areas where additional training or support may be required.

3. Embedding Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

To ensure professional standards are maintained and continually improved:

- HR Advisers hold regular confidential case review meetings to share learning, ensure a consistency of approach and identify process improvements.
- We have utilised this learning to develop internal case studies based on real scenarios to support training whilst ensuring anonymity.
- The HR Adviser Team continue ongoing professional development to ensure they keep abreast of legislation and case law.



4. Improving Confidence in Reporting and Cultural Awareness

Recognising findings from HMICFRS and sector-wide cultural reviews, the Service has taken steps to improve psychological safety and reporting confidence:

- We introduced a new Behavioural Competency Framework (BCF), that was more streamlined and supported by an updated training package to improve organisational understanding
- We promote Say So guidance on the intranet and through other communication channels such as induction.
- We continue to conduct analysis of transfers and exit interview data to identify trends or potential unreported issues.
- Updated our transfer and promotion policies in line with HMICFRS recommendations to minimise individuals remaining with the same watch post-promotion to reduce the risks associated with entrenched cultural behaviours
- Rolled out in person sexual harassment awareness training following amendment to the Worker Protection Act.
- Reviewed the Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy and split this out, creating a separate Bullying and Harassment Policy with expanded sections of Sexual Harassment in line with best practice.

Impact and Outcomes

These actions support:

- Greater consistency and quality in investigations and hearings
- Improved manager confidence and capability in addressing conduct issues
- Stronger governance, oversight, and transparency through reporting and audit
- Enhanced organisational learning culture, with structured feedback loops
- Increased confidence in reporting concerns, supported by cultural interventions