



RBFRS Policy Document

Policy Information	Details
Policy Name	Employee Complaints Policy and Procedure
Author	Senior HR Adviser
Owner	Head of HR and L&D
Protective Marking	Official
Version	
Status	Contractual Minor change only – no formal consultation required
Issue Date	
Review Date	2 Years from issue date

Policy Statement	Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) values and celebrates diversity and believes that everybody should be treated with dignity and respect without the fear of discrimination, harassment or bullying. Employees are expected to model positive behaviours inside and outside the workplace by treating everyone with dignity and respect and recognising and challenging inappropriate behaviours. RBFRS has a zero tolerance approach to all forms of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation and expects that everybody will report any such incidents either towards themselves or others immediately. All incidents of any inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour will be challenged, investigated and suitable action will be taken. The confidentiality of all those involved will be maintained wherever possible. All individuals can trust that their concerns, problems or complaints will be dealt with sensitively and fairly and be resolved as soon as possible. If you have concerns you feel cannot be raised through this policy, these can be raised through RBFRS' external 'Say So' reporting site or if it is more appropriate to do so, via the Whistleblowing policy.
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Purpose	The policy sets out the process you can follow should you have a complaint regarding your own or another's treatment in the workplace. It lays down actions which need to be taken and the appropriate timescales.
Scope	This policy applies to all employees of RBFRS, and voluntary representatives of RBFRS.
Supporting Information	Bullying and Harassment Policy Management Tools - Mediation Process - Managers Guide to Investigating Complaints Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Whistleblowing Policy Trans Equality Policy Staff Safety Risk Assessment Employee Code of Conduct Behavioural Competency Framework Equality Act 2010 The Worker Protection (Amendment of the Equality Act 2011) Act 2023 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Guidance Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Procedure Recruitment and Induction Policy NFCC Positive Disclosure Risk Assessment Guidance NFCC Managing Allegations Guidance

Revision History			
Revision	Description	Author	Date
8	Added to new policy template, general review and removal of repetition	HR Adviser	09/04/2021
9	Inclusion of information on dual discrimination and expansion of specific examples of inappropriate behaviour.	Senior HR Adviser	17/08/2022
10	Expansion of definitions of bullying and harassment. Inclusion of information on the protected characteristics as defined in the	Senior HR Adviser	24/03/2023

Revision History			
Revision	Description	Author	Date
	Equality Act 2010. Inclusion on paragraph regarding representation.		
11	Inclusion of information on Welfare Officers for those making or the subject of a complaint	Senior HR Adviser	29/08/2023
12	Addition of statement that individuals are responsible for their behaviour in and outside the workplace. Inclusion of information relating to individual liability for acts of victimisation. Inclusion of information on Third Party harassment and types of harassment in line with requirements of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2012) Act 2023). Revision of time limits of raising a complaint in line with the ACAS code of practice and good practice from other Fire and Rescue Services. Addition of link to Staff Safety Risk Assessment. Inclusion of an additional appendix detail the complaint reporting process.	Senior HR Adviser	23/07/2024
13	Update to policy to include a statement that complaints dealt with wherever possible before an employee leaves employment and inclusion of specific references to online bullying and harassment.	Senior HR Adviser	11/08/2025
14	Removal of the examples of bullying and harassment (which will now sit in a separate policy). This policy now relates to the grievance/complaints process only.	Senior HR Adviser	04/02/2026

Authorisation	
Approving SLT Member	Becci Jefferies (HHRLD)
Approving Director (If Required)	Nikki Richards (DCE/DCS)

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Policy Detail

Definitions

Grievance

Grievances are issues you may have with your work, working environment or terms and conditions of employment.

Note – Collective grievances by a group of staff (or made on behalf of a group of staff by their representative body) fall outside the scope of this policy and are dealt with between management and the Trade Union and/or employee representatives.

Employee Complaints Procedure

Any grievances or complaints should ideally be dealt with informally in the first instance and you are encouraged to raise any complaints with your line manager (or other appropriate manager) in order that it can be dealt with. This is to ensure that, wherever possible and as appropriate, issues are addressed at source. However, if the complaint is of a serious nature or cannot be resolved informally a formal complaint may be immediately made.

If you have a concern you feel cannot be raised through this policy, these can be raised through the external '[Say So](#)' reporting site or if it is more appropriate to do so, via the [Whistleblowing policy](#) (which outlines the process for reporting serious concerns made in the public interest regarding any aspect of service provision or the conduct of officers, members of RBFRS, or others acting on behalf of RBFRS).

Any grievance or complaint will be settled as near to its source as is possible and within the timescales detailed in [Appendix 2](#). Wherever possible, those investigating the complaint will endeavour to meet the timescales prescribed in [Appendix 2](#). However, there may occasionally be times that issues beyond the control of the investigating officer will cause delays – where this is the case all parties will be advised. Investigations will be considered a priority in order to facilitate a prompt solution for the benefit of all parties.

Raising a Complaint

If you wish to raise a complaint, the process below should be followed.

Where possible, you should raise complaints informally with your line manager. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to your line manager, speak to another manager or raise the issue with the HR department, who will advise you what you should do. Staff are encouraged to raise complaints as soon as reasonably practicable and without any unreasonable delay after the event (or series of events) have occurred. This should be no longer than three months after the event (or the latest incident if a series of events have occurred).

To ensure a fair and reasonable investigation can take place, if a complaint is raised outside of the three month timeframe, RBFRS will determine if it is appropriate to investigate the matter or consider whether it is out of time, taking into account the reason for the complaint, employee's reasons for not raising the matter sooner (for example long term sickness, or only just being made aware of the matter) and the ability to undertake a fair and reasonable investigation.

Unless individual circumstances make it difficult, or compliance with the law makes this impossible employee will remain in their current role and at their current workplace whilst the issues are resolved.

Wherever possible, a grievance will be dealt with before an employee leaves employment.

Stage 1 - Informal Complaint

Discuss the complaint or grievance with your line manager.

In order to monitor the nature of complaints within the organisation to support improvements in our service, we would encourage you to complete the [Informal Complaint Monitoring Form](#). This anonymous form will be forwarded to HR on completion and will be logged and destroyed in line with the HR retention schedule.

Your line manager will arrange to meet with you to discuss your complaint. Your Line Manager will use the investigation checklist on the reverse of the complaint monitoring form. Having heard your complaint your line manager will outline the actions to be taken and time frames.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your informal complaint or you feel that the complaint is more serious and warrants a more formal approach, you can make a formal complaint. In this case, you should submit your complaint in writing using the [Formal Complaints Reporting Form](#). Cases will normally be investigated by your Line Manager, however you have the right to request an Investigating Officer of the same gender for cases involving harassment of a sexual nature. In some cases, i.e. where the complaint concerns the Chief Fire Officer, the matter may be referred to the Fire Authority.

When the Investigating Officer has completed the investigation, you will be informed of the findings in an outcome letter. A meeting can be arranged if necessary.

Where situations raised by third parties are of a serious nature, RBFRS may investigate the issue without receiving a formal complaint. The line manager should ensure that individuals are aware that the action being taken is a managerial decision.

If you are the subject of a complaint you will be notified in writing and will be given the opportunity to respond to the issues raised.

Stage 3 – Appeal

If you remain dissatisfied with the decision at the formal level you may appeal the decision.

The right of appeal applies to both the person raising the complaint under the Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy and those against whom allegations have been brought.

The name of the person to whom you should appeal will be made clear in your outcome letter. You should put your appeal in writing, stating the grounds for the appeal, no later than seven days after you have been informed of the outcome of your complaint.

Your appeal will be heard by a higher level of management than those that investigated the complaint as detailed below:

Level of Initial Investigator	Minimum Level of those hearing the Appeal
Watch Manager / Team Leader	Station Manager / Department Manager
Station Manager	Group Manager A / Department Manager
Group Manager A	Group Manager B / Head of Service
Group Manager B / Department Manager	Area Manager / Head of Service
Area Manager / Head of Service	Deputy Chief Fire Officer / Director
Deputy Chief Fire Officer / Director	Chief Fire Officer
Chief Fire Officer	Fire Authority

The grounds for appeal are:

- The laid down procedure was not followed correctly.
- The issue was not proved on the balance of probabilities
- The actions identified by the Investigating Officer were too severe or not appropriate
- New evidence has come to light since the hearing, which will have an impact on the original decision

Managers hearing appeals will be accompanied where possible by an alternative HR representative to that which advised the original Investigating Officer.

General Issues

Representation

You can be accompanied by a fellow employee or Trade Union representative of your choice at all stages of this procedure with the exception of where the chosen representative has a conflict of interest e.g. they are also under investigation or a witness to the matter under investigation.

Disciplinary Issues

If the complaint leads to a disciplinary issue, the complaint may be suspended pending the disciplinary investigation and hearing outcome. When this has been completed, you will receive an outcome letter from the investigating officer which will outline the findings. A meeting can be arranged if necessary.

You will not be informed of the specific details in relation to any third party disciplinary or management action nor actions personal to an individual such as additional training or development. You may however be called as a witness to any subsequent investigations or hearings as necessary.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All parties should maintain confidentiality as far as possible given the scope and nature of the investigation.

In bullying or harassment cases you may ask to remain anonymous. However, in practice this is often difficult as all parties involved should be given a fair opportunity to put their case and this may

include being given details of your identity and the allegations made by you. If we need to disclose your details and you have asked for anonymity, you will be consulted beforehand and supported throughout the process. If disciplinary action results from the complaint it will be necessary for your identity to be disclosed.

On rare occasions, the matter raised may be so serious that you or someone else is at serious risk, or the act constitutes a breach of legislation. In such cases RBFRS may be obliged to take action despite your wishes. This may include disclosing the information to the police or other statutory or governmental bodies. In this case you will be supported throughout the process.

Allegations raised by the public against an employee or employees are outside of this procedure. Where a complaint or an allegation of bullying and/or discrimination comes from a member of the public, an external complaints form must be completed. The complaint will be fully investigated and appropriate procedures and policies implemented depending on the outcome. If a disciplinary investigation is appropriate the evidence gathered in the complaint investigation will be used as evidence for the investigation.

If you raise a complaint once you have left the organisation it will be treated as an external complaint.

Malicious / Frivolous Complaints

RBFRS believe that all complaints of inappropriate behaviour should be taken seriously and fully investigated, however in some very rare cases complaints may be brought maliciously. Where the Investigating Officer has a belief that this is the case, they will consult HR before a decision is made. The decision to not progress the complaint will only be made if there is clear evidence to support the allegation of malicious or frivolous intention. If there is any uncertainty a full investigation will be carried out. Complaints that are found to be malicious or vexatious may potentially lead to disciplinary action.

Access to Investigation Reports

You are not entitled to receive a copy of the full final report and any witness statements in their entirety as they may contain personal data, but the Investigating Officer may agree to release part or all of the report where this does not compromise the confidentiality of other people. Details of any disciplinary action arising from the case are considered to be confidential and therefore cannot be made available to you. You will, however, be informed in the outcome letter that your complaint has been upheld or overturned and, in broad terms, the action to be taken.

Welfare Officer

In complex or sensitive cases, a Welfare Officer may be assigned to those making a complaint, as well as those that are the subject of the complaint.

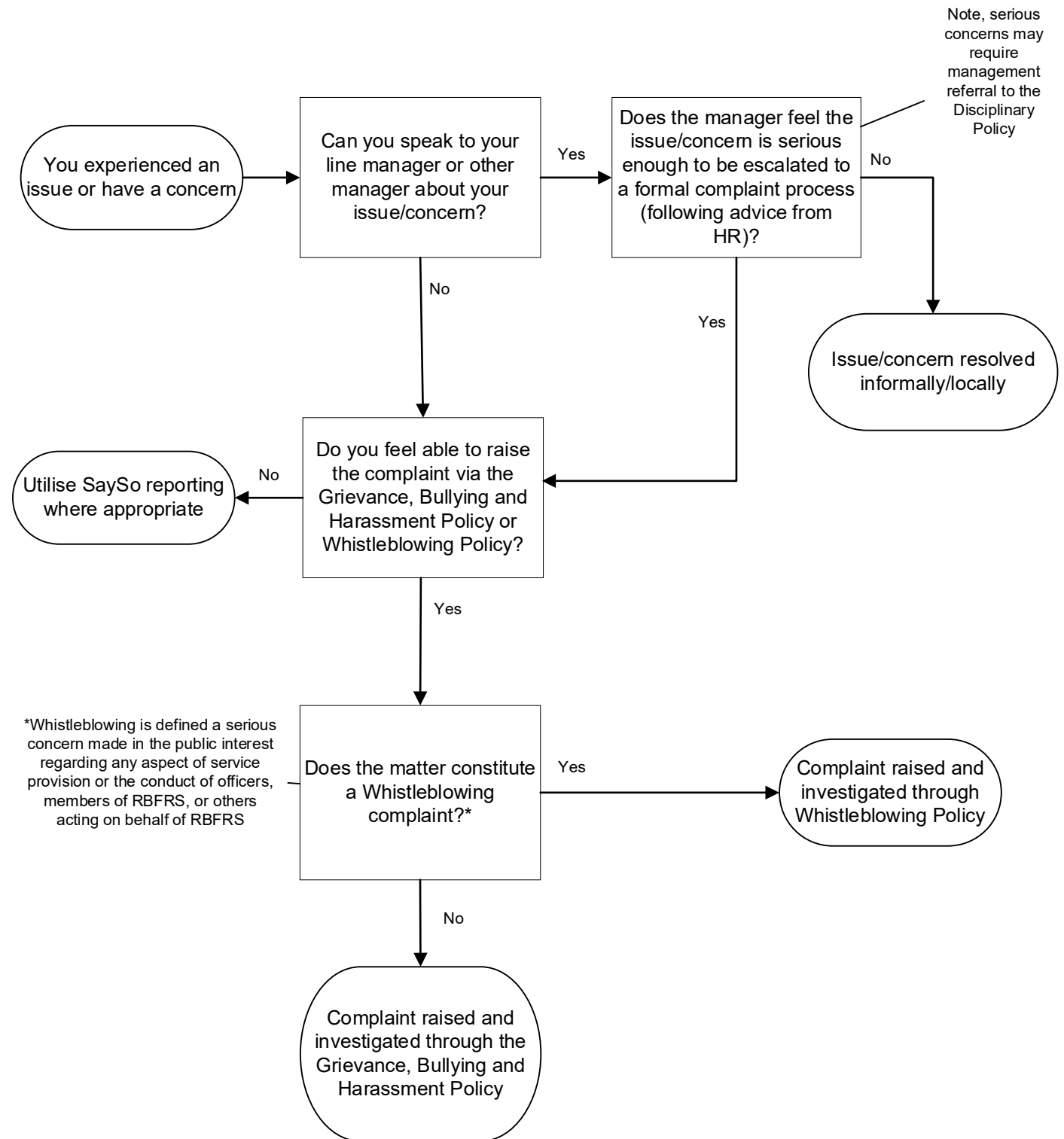
Additional Sources of Support

In addition to the support provided through this policy, you are reminded of the additional sources of support available through the Employee Assistance Programme (details are available on [Siren](#)), Trade Unions and the Blue Light Champions. The [Well at Work](#) pages on Siren also list additional sources of support.

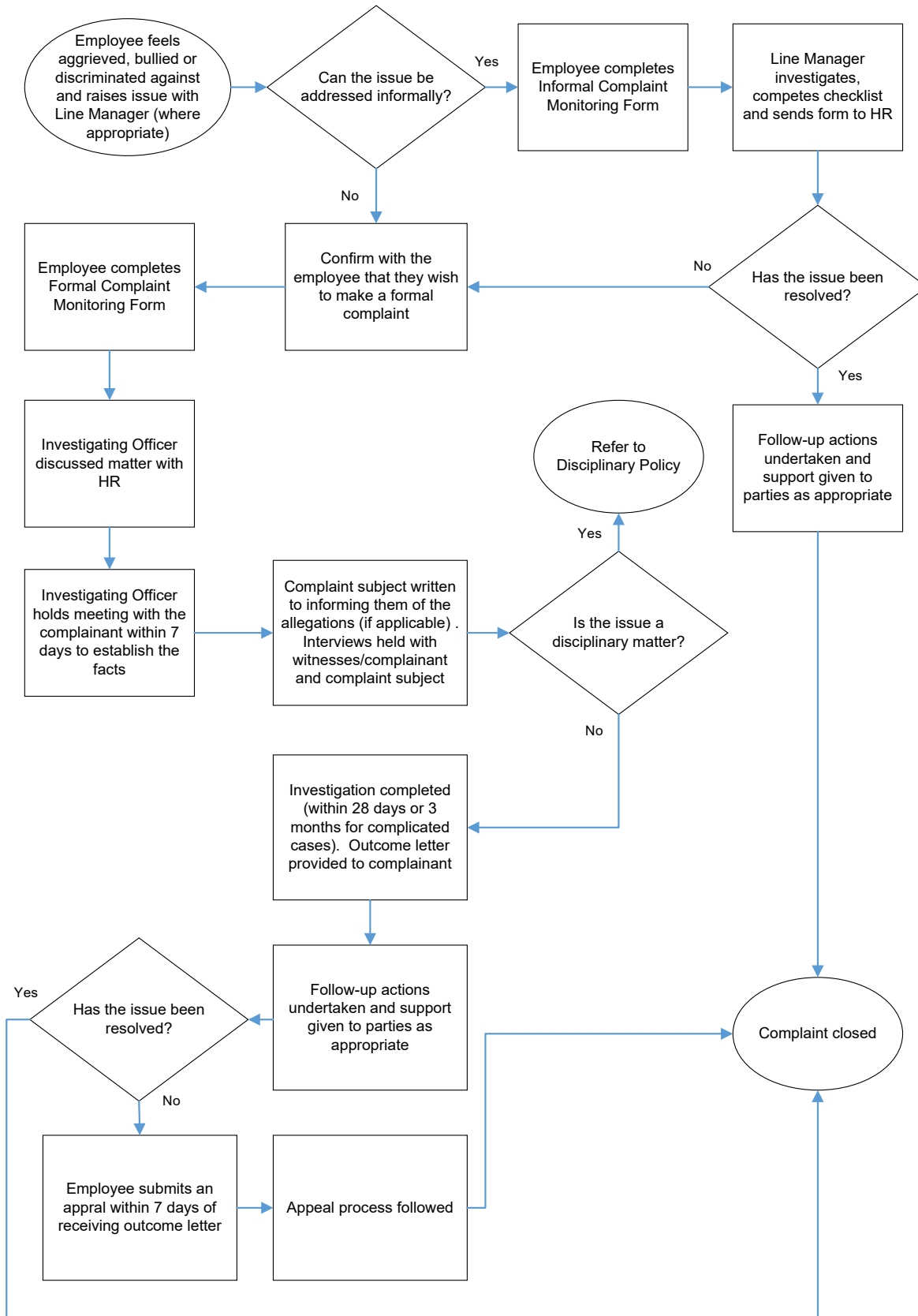
Review

This policy will be reviewed within 2 years of its publication date or when required by a change in circumstances.

Appendix 1 – Raising a Complaint



Appendix 2 –Complaint Investigation Process



Initial Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the below if making significant revisions or this is a new policy.

Name and Role of Person Completing Assessment: Lucy Greenway Senior HR Adviser		Date of Assessment: 18/03/2026
1. Who is intended to benefit from this policy/service, and in what way?	This policy outlines the process for dealing with employee complaints, which ensures all complaints are dealt with effectively, fairly and consistently. A flow chart has been included to ensure staff understand the employee complaints process.	
2. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the policy/service? (e.g. applicants, service users, member of the public, RBFRS employees, partner organisations)	RBFRS employees and voluntary representatives	
Please briefly describe any potential impacts (neutral, positive, negative) of the policy / revisions of the policy on the groups below:		
Sex (Men and Women)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Race (All Racial Groups)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Disability (Mental, Physical, and Carers of Disabled people)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Religion or Belief	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	
Sexual Orientation (All diverse sexual orientations)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.	

Pregnancy and Maternity (Includes new mothers and those returning to the workplace)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Marital Status (Married and Civil Partnerships)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Trans People (Includes non-binary identities and all other diverse gender identities/expressions)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Age (People of all ages)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
People in different family circumstances (including those with caring responsibilities)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
People in different social circumstances (including socio-economic factors i.e. poverty and isolation)	Positive – this policy is designed to offer equality protection for all groups and provides a process for any concerns or issues relating to discriminatory behaviour can be addressed effectively.
Different employee groups (including consideration of on-call staff, grades, contract status. Also consider non-employee groups i.e. casual workers, volunteers)	Positive – this policy is applicable to all staff regardless of contractual status.
Other – this may include consideration of other factors as relevant to the activity such as unemployment, homelessness, urbanisation, rurality, health inequalities	Positive
If any potential negative impacts have been identified you must complete a full Equality Impact Assessment (Form 280) before publication.	