

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 JUNE 2014

REPORT ON: ANNUAL REPORT ON COMPLAINTS

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 178-2014

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on complaints statistics and satisfaction for 2013/2014 and to update members on the action being taken to ensure the effectiveness of the complaints handling procedure and to learn from complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members note:

- a) the key performance indicators on complaints closed between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014
- b) the latest summary of findings from the Complaints Review Group which meets quarterly to check the quality of complaints handling and to promote learning and process improvement from complaints
- c) the results of the satisfaction survey sent to everyone who made a complaint which was closed during 2013/2014

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Since 1 October 2012, the Council has been operating the new model Complaints Handling Procedure for Local Authorities as required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

4.2 Report 253-2013 to Scrutiny Committee on 25 June 2013 outlined the actions which had been taken to implement the new procedure and provided an analysis of complaints closed in the 6 months between the introduction of the new procedure and 31 March 2013.

4.3 This report covers complaints closed between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, and includes key performance indicators as well as results of the satisfaction survey sent to all those who made complaints which were closed during this period.

4.4 The report also updates members on the work of the Complaints Review Group which meets to check the effectiveness of the complaints handling procedure and promote learning and process improvement from complaints.

5. COMPLAINTS STATISTICS : 1 APRIL 2013 – 31 MARCH 2014

5.1 Analysis of key indicators for 2013/2014 shows that:

- 499 complaints were recorded as closed off during the year (this excludes complaints about Social Work as they are not subject to the model Complaints Handling Procedure and there are statutory complaints procedures for Social Work on which the Director of Social Work reports separately to Committee. It also

excludes Leisure and Culture Dundee who use the Council's complaints recording system but report separately on these). This is an increase on the 294 complaints recorded in 2012/13 but we believe this reflects the greater use of the electronic complaints recording system rather than any increase in actual complaints made

- 91.5% of complaints were closed at the frontline resolution stage and 8.5% at the investigation stage
- 56.0% of complaints at the frontline stage were closed within the target of 5 working days (compared to 61.5% from October 2012 to March 2013). A further 26.6% (compared to 14.1% in the previous year) were closed within an extended target time (where complaints are expected to take longer than 5 days to respond to, officers can extend the target date but have to record the reasons for this and are expected to keep complainants informed of progress).
- 71.4% of complaints at the investigation stage were closed within the 20 working days target (compared to 85.7 % in the previous year). A further 11.9% of cases were closed within an extended target time (compared to 14.3% in the previous year)
- 40.0% of complaints were upheld at the frontline resolution stage, compared to 30.7% in the previous year. The SPSO has amended the guidance on key indicators to allow recording of 'partially upheld' complaints and a further 6.5% of cases were assessed this way during the year
- of the 42 complaints dealt with at the investigation stage, 15 were upheld and 3 were partially upheld
- the average number of working days taken to close complaints was 7.8 days at the frontline stage (compared to 6.2 days in 2012/13) and 15.4 days at the investigation stage (compared to 9.7 days in the previous year). Analysis of the distribution of 'days to resolve' shows that 74% of complaints were closed within 10 days at frontline stage and 91% of complaints were closed within 30 days at the investigation stage
- by nature of complaint, the percentage recorded in each of the complaint categories is shown below (with the figure for the previous year in brackets):

- delay in responding to enquiries and requests	-	17.3% (21.4%)
- failure to meet our service standards	-	16.2% (19.7%)
- treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff	-	27.5% (19.3%)
- failure to provide a service	-	17.8% (16.0%)
- dissatisfaction with our policy	-	13.7% (9.7%)
- failure to follow the proper administrative process	-	6.3% (7.6%)
- refusal to give advice or answer questions	-	1.2% (0.4%)
- other	-	0% (5.9%)

Members asked at the last meeting for a breakdown of the nature of complaints by department. The facility to run this analysis is being added to the system and this breakdown will be provided once the IT development has been completed.

- 25 people made more than one complaint during 2013/14, 20 making two complaints, 3 making three complaints and 1 each making four and five complaints
- by department, the highest number of complaints recorded were for Housing (177), Education (136), Corporate Services (106), City Development (40), Environment (29) and Chief Executive's (11)

- 5.2 More details, including departmental breakdowns, are given in the Appendices.
- 5.3 As noted above, there has been a decline in the % of complaints dealt with within the target time and a corresponding increase in the average number of days taken to close complaints, compared to the first 6 months of using the new procedure. Use of the electronic recording system continues to increase and this has involved a learning process for many officers using this for the first time. Guidance has been issued on the importance of responding to complaints promptly.
- 5.4 The analysis above suggests an increase in the % of complaints relating to treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff. We believe this reflects greater recording of complaints by departments where personal contact between staff and service users is more prevalent. The Council's Annual Consumer Survey, and the Govmetric surveys carried out after customer contacts, continue to show high levels of satisfaction with the politeness, courtesy and helpfulness of staff. The Council has also recently launched a customer service charter and an e-learning training package on customer care to ensure that good customer care remains a key element of the Council's service.
- 5.5 To put the number of formal complaints received into context, the Council manages a huge volume of transactions with customers. For example, we:
- manage over 13,000 Council houses and relet over 1,400 of these each year
 - carry out around 55,000 repairs each year and deal with over 1,500 reports of anti-social behaviour
 - bill around 74,000 domestic properties for Council Tax and issue approximately 350,000 Council Tax bills and reminder notices, not including benefit
 - notifications and other letters which would take the total number of Revenues transactions to over 600,000
 - educate over 17,000 pupils and process nearly 1,500 placing requests
 - process over 4,000 free school meal and clothing grant applications and over 600 applications for Education Maintenance Allowance
 - carry out around 800 food inspection visits, 600 occupational health and safety visits and 7,000 pest control visits
- 5.6 However, it must also be acknowledged that not all expressions of dissatisfaction are recorded through the formal complaints procedure e.g. customers may choose instead to ask councillors to take up their case or use other procedures such as appeal processes and insurance claims, or raise service delivery issues such as late repairs or missed services which are simply resolved without any formal response. The Council also carries out a range of customer feedback processes to inform managers of where there are opportunities to make improvements.
- 5.7 The Council's Senior Management Team is considering how to most effectively collate information on 'complaint type' cases raised by Councillors and the Chief Executive will report back on this.
- 5.8 Complaints made about the Council to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman will be reported to Committee following receipt of the Ombudsman's annual letter. Information on complaints for 2012/13 was reported to Committee on 25 September 2013 and we expect to report on Ombudsman complaints for 2013/2014 in September 2014.

6. QUALITY CHECKS

- 6.1 There is now a well-established procedure` which involves a Complaints Review Group, made up of complaints administrators from a number of departments and officers concerned with performance and improvement from the Chief Executive's Department, meeting on a quarterly basis to review a sample of complaints. The group's remit is to consider:
- was the complaint correctly recorded on the electronic system?
 - was the complaint responded to in a reasonable time?
 - was the complaint investigated to a reasonable degree to establish the root cause?
 - was there evidence that the complainant was satisfied?
 - was the message given to the complainant satisfactory from the perspective of the Council's values?
 - was a lesson learned from the complaint that can be generalised and a better practice adopted?
- 6.2 The group has continued to meet quarterly to review in detail a random sample of complaints closed during the previous three months. In addition, the group is now looking, as requested by Internal Audit, at all 'open' complaints which are beyond the target date for response, and have also begun looking in detail at the planned improvements identified by officers when they close off complaints which have been upheld or partially upheld.
- 6.3 The group continues to find evidence that complaints are generally being recorded, investigated and responded to well, along with increasing evidence that complainants are being contacted to keep them informed of progress if complaints are taking longer than expected to investigate. However, the group does still see some cases where targets have been missed or complainants have not been advised about escalating complaints if still dissatisfied. The importance of dealing with complaints quickly, keeping complainants informed and advising complainants what to do if still dissatisfied continues to be reinforced in guidance to staff through emails and presentations.
- 6.4 In terms of how complaints are responded to, we have reminded officers of the importance of using plain English and using bullet points, headings etc to make complex information easier to understand. We have also emphasised the importance of ensuring that complainants are advised how to escalate their complaint if dissatisfied when complaints are being responded to verbally.
- 6.5 Among the process improvement issues arising from the group's review of complaints in the last year were actions relating to customer care, processing forms, accident recording procedures, stair cleaning, pool car use, communications via the website, housing repairs, use of the 'potentially violent persons' database and risk assessments by vehicle drivers. Some complaints reviewed suggested that processes would benefit from a STEP review – the Council's approach to process improvement based on 'systems thinking' – and will be referred to the STEP mentors in each department for inclusion in their programme.
- 6.6 In addition to the sample of cases reviewed by the group, officers closing off complaints which were upheld or partially upheld are asked to complete a 'planned service improvements' field. Most of these involve speaking to individuals about errors or arranging training for teams to remind them of procedures, customer care standards etc,

but examples of process improvements recorded cover topics such as ID for officers issuing fixed penalty notices, repairs liaison group using case reviews to develop improvements, communications between schools and parents, nursery enrolment, quality assurance checks after relet inspections, monitoring of work by contractors, residents' parking permits, delineation of areas for grass cutting, advice on roof/rainwater goods repairs, disabled adaptations affected by improvements, breakfast club provision, credit card payments, dispensation from parking restrictions, addressing of benefit correspondence, allocation of Council Tax payments, advising customers if late for appointments, and maintenance of fitness equipment.

- 6.7 A new feature of the electronic complaints recording system will see an automatic email being sent to those who recorded planned service improvements, to ensure that the improvements have been implemented, and these updates will be reviewed by the Complaints Review Group.

7. SATISFACTION WITH THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 7.1 Part of the performance management framework required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is that the Council reports on a measure of customer satisfaction with the complaints process. To achieve this, we issue quarterly satisfaction surveys to all those who have made a complaint in the previous three months. Over the course of 2013/14, 129 completed questionnaires were returned.

- 7.2 The results for each quarter of 2013/14 are shown in the tables below along with the figures for 2012/13. Given that the survey sample consisted entirely of people who had made complaints about the Council, the majority of which were not upheld, it is perhaps not surprising that there are fairly high levels of dissatisfaction. On average around 60% of those who responded to the survey said they did not get the outcome they wanted from the complaint and it is recognised to be very difficult to get complainants to comment objectively on the complaints process, as distinct from the outcome, where their complaint was not upheld or did not result in the action they wanted.

7.2.1 How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with:

		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Answer
The information on how to make a complaint (e.g. our complaints procedure leaflet or the information on our website)	Qtr 4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	26%	19%	22%	13%	10%	10%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	24%	24%	24%	4%	24%	0%
	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	13%	32%	16%	16%	23%	0%
	Qtr1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	12%	31%	30%	12%	15%	0%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	10%	37.5%	25%	7.5%	20%	0%

The way you were treated by the staff who handled your complaint (e.g. their politeness)	Qtr 4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	29%	19%	16%	10%	13%	13%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	37%	18%	13%	16%	16%	0%
	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	16%	45%	10%	10%	19%	0%
	Qtr1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	19%	31%	8%	15%	23%	4%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	12.5%	22.5%	15%	27.5%	20%	2.5%
The time taken to deal with your complaint	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	26%	16%	6%	23%	23%	6%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	29%	13%	15%	11%	32%	0%
	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	13%	19%	14%	19%	35%	0%
	Qtr1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	4%	23%	8%	15%	46%	4%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	5%	10%	12.5%	22.5%	47.5%	2.5%

7.2.2 Throughout the process, were you:

		Yes	No	No answer
Kept up-to-date with progress on your complaint if it took longer than 5 working days to give you a full response	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	55%	35%	10%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	37%	53%	10%
	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	52%	48%	0%
	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	31%	65%	4%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	25%	70%	5%
Given information that was clear and easy to understand	Qtr4 2013-14 (Jan-Mar)	65%	29%	6%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	55%	42%	3%
	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	52%	45%	3%
	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	42%	54%	4%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	45%	47.5%	7.5%
Told who to contact if you had any queries, or if you were unhappy with the decision	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	58%	29%	13%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	58%	39%	3%
	Qtr 2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	58%	42%	0%

	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr- Jun)	54%	42%	4%
	2012/13 (Oct- Mar)	50%	45%	5%

7.2.3 Even if you did not get the outcome you wanted from your complaint, how satisfied were you that:

		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Answer
Your complaint was taken seriously by the Council	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	26%	13%	12%	10%	29%	10%
	Qtr3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	29%	24%	5%	8%	34%	0%
	Qtr 2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	19%	23%	7%	3%	42%	6%
	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	12%	19%	15%	8%	38%	8%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	10%	17.5%	12.5%	20%	40%	0%
	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	23%	13%	13%	6%	35%	10%
You were given a clear explanation of the reasons for the Council's decision	Qtr 3 2013/14 (Oct-Dec)	26%	16%	8%	8%	39%	3%
	Qtr 2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	16%	13%	14%	6%	45%	6%
	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	12%	15%	23%	15%	27%	8%
	2013/13 (Oct-Mar)	5%	15%	10%	25%	42.5%	2.5%
	Qtr4 2013/14 (Jan-Mar)	23%	13%	13%	6%	35%	10%

7.3 Further guidance has been issued to staff on handling complaints to emphasise the importance of responding on time to complaints, keeping complainants informed where an early resolution is not possible, giving clear information and explanations and advising who complainants should contact if they remain dissatisfied. The aim is to increase the % of complainants who acknowledge that the process of dealing with their

complaint was satisfactory even if they did not get the outcome they desired, and the results of the most recent survey do show improvements in a number of the indicators.

- 7.4 Satisfaction surveys will continue to be issued to complainants on a quarterly basis so that trends in the results can continue to be reported to Committee.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

- 8.2 The complaints recording system includes a feature that asks complaint handlers to identify whether or not the complaint related to any equalities issue – age, disability, gender, LGBT, race or religion. In 2013/14 there was one such case identified, and this was brought to the attention of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator.

9. CONSULTATIONS

The Director of Corporate Services, Head of Democratic and Legal Services and all chief officers have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

David K Dorward
Chief Executive

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20/06/2014

APPENDIX ONE**QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE TRENDS**

Indicator	2013/2014				2014/2015			
	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
Number of complaints recorded (excluding Social Work)	85	128	134	152				
% of complaints at frontline stage closed within 5 working day target	53.2	70.6	49.6	50.4				
% of complaints at frontline stage closed within extended target	24.7	21.8	23.6	34.0				
% of complaints at investigation stage closed within 20 working day target	87.5	77.8	61.5	66.7				
% of complaints at investigation stage closed within extended target	12.5	0	7.7	25.0				
% of complaints upheld at frontline stage	48.1	43.7	43.1	29.1				
% of complaints partially upheld at frontline stage	-	-	8.9	13.5				
% of complaints upheld at investigation stage	12.5	66.7	61.5	0				
% of complaints partially upheld at investigation stage	-	-	15.4	8.3				
Average number of days to close complaints at frontline stage	8.7	6.2	8.3	8.4				
Average number of working days to close complaints at investigation stage	14	10.4	22	12.8				

APPENDIX TWO

BREAKDOWN OF DATA ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (AS SPECIFIED BY THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN)

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Corporate Services)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	101	95.3	72	71.3	16	15.8	37	36.6	62	61.4	2	2.0	5.2
Investigation	5	4.7	4	80.0			1	20.0	4	80.0			8.6

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Education Department)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	125	91.9	59	47.2	26	20.8	50	40.0	61	48.8	14	11.2	11.8
Investigation	11	8.1	7	63.6	1	9.1	6	54.5	3	27.3	2	18.2	16.4

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Housing Department)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	157	88.7	86	54.8	56	35.7	71	45.2	80	51.0	6	3.8	6.8
Investigation	20	11.3	15	75.0	2	10.0	7	35.0	12	60.0	1	5.0	15.7

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Environment)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	27	93.1	10	37.0	16	59.3	10	37.0	13	48.1	4	14.8	10.7
Investigation	2	6.9	1	50.0	1	50.0			2	100.0			16.1

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (City Development)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	37	92.5	22	59.5	6	16.2	10	27.0	23	62.2	4	10.8	8.3
Investigation	3	7.5	2	66.7	1	33.3	1	33.3	2	66.7			24.4

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Chief Executive's)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	10	90.9	7	70.0	3	30.0	5	50.0	5	50.0			7.1
Investigation	1	9.1	1	100.0					1	100.0			3.1

Key Indicators report (01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014) (Totals)													
Stage Description	Total		Within Target		With Extension		Upheld		Not upheld		Partially upheld		Average days to resolve
	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	Count	% age	
Frontline	457	91.5	256	56.0	123	26.6	183	40.0	244	53.4	30	6.6	7.8
Investigation	42	8.5	30	71.4	5	11.9	15	35.7	24	57.1	3	7.1	15.4