

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 DECEMBER 2013

REPORT ON: COMPLAINTS

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 507-2013

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on complaints statistics for the second quarter of 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 July and 30 September 2013
- b) the latest summary of findings from the Complaints Review Group which meets 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 between 1 July and 30 September 2013

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 between the introduction of the new procedure and 31 March 2013. Report 335-2013 to Scrutiny Committee on 25 September 2013 provided a similar analysis for the first quarter of 2013/2014 i.e. for complaints closed between 1 April and 30 June 2013.

4.3 This report covers complaints closed during the second quarter of 2013/2014, from 1 July to 30 September 2013, 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. 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 JULY – 30 SEPTEMBER 2013

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

- 150 complaints were recorded as closed off during the three months. However, although Social Work now use the complaints recording database they are not subject to the model Complaints Handling Procedure as there are separate statutory complaints procedures for Social Work. The statistics below and in the

Appendices are based on 128 complaints, excluding 22 recorded about Social Work. The Director of Social Work reports separately to Committee on complaints

- 93% of complaints were closed at the frontline resolution stage and 7% at the investigation stage
- 70.6% of complaints at the frontline stage were closed within the 5 day target (compared to 53.2% in the previous quarter). A further 21.8% (compared to 24.7% in the previous quarter) 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). Staff have been reminded of the importance of aiming to respond to complaints within the target times and keeping complainants informed where this is not possible and the target has to be extended
- 77.8% of complaints at the investigation stage (7 out of 9) were closed within the 20 day target (compared to 87.5% in the previous quarter – 7 out of 8). The remaining 2 cases were closed outwith the target time
- 43.7% of complaints were upheld at the frontline resolution stage, down from 48.1% in the previous period
- of the 9 complaints dealt with at the investigation stage, 6 were upheld (compared to 1 out of 8 in the previous quarter)
- the average number of days taken to close complaints was 6.2 days at the frontline stage (compared to 8.7 days between April and June) and 10.4 days at the investigation stage (compared to 14 days in the previous quarter)
- by nature of complaint, the percentage recorded in each of the complaint categories is shown below (with the figure for the previous quarter in brackets):

- delay in responding to enquiries and requests	-	20%	(14.7%)
- failure to meet our service standards	-	17.3%	(18.3%)
- treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff	-	27.3%	(32.1%)
- failure to provide a service	-	20%	(20.2%)
- dissatisfaction with our policy	-	10%	(6.4%)
- failure to follow the proper administrative process	-	4%	(7.3%)
- refusal to give advice or answer questions	-	1.3%	(1.0%)
- 6 people made more than one complaint during the three month period from July to September, all making 2 complaints
- by department, the highest number of complaints recorded were for Housing (49), Corporate Services (36), Education (23), Environment (9), City Development (7) and Chief Executive's (2)

More details, including departmental breakdowns, are given in the Appendices

5.2 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
- undertake over 7 million uplifts of residual waste and recycles from over 135,000 properties every year
- carry out around 800 food inspection visits, 600 occupational health and safety visits and 7,000 pest control visits

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.

5.3 The Council's Senior Management Team have been discussing ways in which information on 'complaint type' cases raised by Councillors can best be collated and reported, and proposals will be brought forward for including this information in future reports.

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 held further meetings in October 2013 and reviewed in detail a random sample of complaints closed during the period from July to September. The group continues to find evidence that complaints are 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. The importance of dealing with complaints quickly, keeping complainants informed and advising complainants what to do if still dissatisfied was reinforced in further guidance issued to staff in August and it is good to see further evidence of this happening in practice.

6.3 In terms of how complaints are responded to, we will be reminding officers of the importance of using plain English and using bullet points, headings etc to make complex information easier to understand. We are also emphasising the importance of ensuring that complainants are advised how to escalate their complaint if dissatisfied when complaints are being responded to verbally.

6.4 Among the process improvement issues arising from the group's review of the sample of complaints were:

- a STEP review of Customer Services is to consider the issue of time taken to answer calls – what can be done to reduce waiting time within existing resources e.g. encourage calls at less busy times, encourage channel shift
- policy and technical issues regarding the telephone system are to be referred to the Customer Review Group
- all schools are to be made aware of the need to follow accident recording procedures
- a review of the roles, responsibilities and powers to deal with cleaning of stairwells and bin areas is to be proposed to the Housing and Environment Departments
- officers who manage the pool cars booking system to ensure there is an easily accessible record of who has driven the cars
- robust action to be taken in cases of staff giving poor customer service

6.5 In addition to the sample of cases reviewed by the group, departments themselves are asked to identify improvements arising from complaints by completing a 'planned service improvements' field when closing off complaints which were upheld. A number of these involved speaking to individuals and teams or arranging training to remind them of procedures, customer care standards etc, but examples of process improvements recorded include:

- post relet inspection quality assurance checks being reviewed by District Housing office
- closer monitoring of work by contractors on housing project
- school procedures about sharing information reviewed and circulated to staff
- an appeal system for decisions on residents' parking permits to be investigated
- further signage to be arranged regarding Caird Hall exits
- process of identifying areas for grass cutting to be reviewed to ensure areas are clearly delineated and all operatives informed of boundaries
- operatives to be reminded, via Toolbox Talks, that cutting and joining electrical cables in domestic appliances is not part of standard operating procedure

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, a satisfaction survey was issued in October 2013 to those recorded as having made a complaint which had been closed between 1 July and 30 September. 31 completed questionnaires were returned by the deadline given.

7.2 The key results for the second quarter of 2013/14 are shown in the top row of each of the tables below. 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. 68% of those who responded to the survey said they did not get the outcome they wanted from the complaint (compared to 58% in the first quarter of 2013/14 and 60% in the 2012/13 survey), 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. The figures from previous surveys (covering complaints closed in the first quarter of 2013/14 and in 2012/13) are shown below the latest figures for comparison.

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)	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	13%	32%	16%	16%	23%	0%
	Qtr1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	12%	31%	31%	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)	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	Qtr2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	13%	19%	13%	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	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	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	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	Qtr 2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	19%	23%	6%	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%

You were given a clear explanation of the reasons for the Council's decision	Qtr 2 2013/14 (Jul-Sep)	16%	13%	13%	6%	45%	6%
	Qtr 1 2013/14 (Apr-Jun)	12%	15%	3%	15%	27%	8%
	2012/13 (Oct-Mar)	5%	15%	10%	25%	42.5%	2.5%

- 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 the period from 1 July to 30 September 2013, there were no such cases identified.

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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04/12/2013

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						
% of complaints at frontline stage closed within 5 day target	53.2	70.6						
% of complaints at frontline stage closed within extended target	24.7	21.8						
% of complaints at investigation stage closed within 20 day target	87.5	77.8						
% of complaints at investigation stage closed within extended target	12.5	0						
% of complaints upheld at frontline stage	48.1	43.7						
% of complaints upheld at investigation stage	12.5	66.7						
Average number of days to close complaints at frontline stage	8.7	6.2						
Average number of days to close complaints at investigation stage	14	10.4						

APPENDIX TWO

BREAKDOWN OF PERFORMANCE DATA ON INDICATORS SPECIFIED BY THE SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (Corporate Services - Revenues and Customer 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	32	100.0	27	84.4	3	9.4	11	34.4	21	65.6			4.3

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (Chief Executive - Corporate)

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	2	100.0	1	50.0	1	50.0			2	100.0			13.4

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (Corporate Services - Finance and Procurement)

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	3	75.0	1	33.3	1	33.3			3	100.0			9.9
Investigation	1	25.0	1	100.0					1	100.0			9.6

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (Housing)

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	45	91.8	35	77.8	11	24.4	19	42.2	26	57.8			4.3
Investigation	4	8.2	3	75.0			3	75.0	1	25.0			12.3

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (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	19	82.6	10	52.6	4	21.0	11	57.9	8	42.1			10.9
Investigation	4	17.4	3	75.0			3	75.0	1	25.0			8.8

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (Leisure & Culture Dundee)

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	2	100.0	1	50.0					2	100.0			4.9

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (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	9	100.0	4	44.4	5	55.6	6	66.7	3	33.3			10.1

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (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	7	100.0	4	57.1	2	28.6	4	57.1	3	42.9			5.7

SPSO report (01/07/2013 to 30/09/2013) (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	119	93.0	84	70.6	26	21.8	52	43.7	67	56.3			6.2
Investigation	9	7.0	7	77.8			6	66.7	3	33.3			10.4