

To: Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board

On: 13 February 2017

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Annual Complaints Report 2015/16

1. Summary and Key Messages

- 1.1 Renfrewshire Council's complaints handling procedure ensures the Council knows how well it is delivering its services and shows its commitment to using the issues raised in complaints to improve services.
- 1.2 Introduced in 2013, the procedure complies with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) guidance and model complaints handling procedure, and aims to help 'get it right first time'. The aim is to have quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by capable, well-trained staff. As part of the procedure, all complaints resolved at the frontline are also now recorded and monitored.
- 1.3 This report provides information on the complaints Renfrewshire Council received in 2015/16 and shows how this information has been used to ensure that the Council delivers high quality, efficient and responsive services to meet people's needs.
- 1.4 The key messages highlighted in the report are as follows:
 - 6,860 complaints were received in 2015/16, which is an increase from 5725 in 2014/15, reflecting the national trend of a sustained increase in the number of complaints handled by Scottish Local Authorities since the new complaints procedure was introduced in 2013.

- The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the Renfrewshire population is small, with 7 complaints received per 1000 population.
- Renfrewshire Council is increasingly responsive to complaints, reflecting the commitment within the organisation to complaints handling. The average time to respond to frontline complaints received was 3.9 days in 2015/16 improving from 5.7 days in 2014/15 and well within the target of 5 days set by SPSO.
- The average time to respond to an investigation complaint received was 12.6 days, improving from 13.2 days in 2014/15 and well within the target of 20 days set by SPSO.
- Overall 82% of frontline complaints and 94% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales.
- 97% were handled at the frontline stage demonstrating that the Council is highly responsive to initial reports of dissatisfaction from customers.
- The percentage of complaints received that were upheld after investigation has also fallen from 37.5% in 2013/14 to 24.85% in 2015/16. This indicates that the Council is successfully shifting the balance of complaints handling to the frontline resolution stage, which is a key driver of the SPSO model complaints handling procedure.
- Only a very small number of complaints received are escalated to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for investigation. In 2015/16, 52 complaints were investigated by the SPSO. None were fully investigated, only one was partly upheld and none were the subject of a report to the Scottish Parliament. The SPSO indicates that a low uphold rate suggests a robustness in the authority's handling of complaints.
- The breakdown of complaints received by Service, is broadly reflective of the nature and volume of services provided. For example, a significant proportion of complaints are handled by Community Resources. Over 11 million waste and recycling collections are made by the service each year, however complaints about this service delivery account for only 0.1% of the service delivered reflecting very high levels of general satisfaction.

1.5 The report also highlights the continuous improvement activity that the Council intends to undertake during 2017 in relation to complaints handling.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that members of the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board:

- Note the content of this report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Renfrewshire Council's complaint handling procedure was implemented in 2013, and complies with the model Complaints Handling procedure for local authorities introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) at that time.
- 3.2 The Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) reflects Renfrewshire Council's ongoing commitment to the provision of high quality complaints handling. The CHP operates to ensure that complaints are processed and responded to consistently within targeted timescales, with a particular focus on working to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of contact or service delivery.
- 3.3 Services record, analyse and monitor complaints performance and use the information gathered through the CHP to improve service delivery wherever possible.
- 3.4 It is important to note that the model SPSO complaints handling procedure adopted by Renfrewshire Council does not apply to complaints pertaining to the delivery of social care services, which are subject to different and very specific legislative requirements. The complaints handling performance information detailed within this report, therefore does not include social work complaints which are covered within Section 8 of this report.
- 3.5 In line with the model SPSO complaints handling procedure, Renfrewshire Council's CHP uses a two stage process: Frontline Resolution and Investigation stage. These are outlined below

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution

The frontline resolution stage aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage.

The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer, or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint. **The Council has 5 days to respond to these complaints.**

An example of a complaint which may be addressed at the frontline resolution stage is a refuse bin which was missed during a scheduled uplift. When this is reported the service would arrange for a remedial uplift to be made.

Stage 2: Investigation

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Complaints handled at the Investigation stage of the complaints handling procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination before the Council can state its position. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing immediate investigation.

An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position. **The Council has 20 days to respond to these complaints.**

An example of an investigation may relate to the standard or nature of a repair within a council property which requires an inspection or visit to investigate.

3.6 Following the implementation of the CHP in 2013, the organisation has put into place a range of mechanisms to promote awareness of the CHP amongst both customers and employees. For example:

- Posters and promotional materials have been placed at all Council buildings and offices, and forms made available for completion.
- Information is available on the CHP on the Council website, and an online complaints form is available for submission.
- The CHP and complaints form can be completed on the Council's intranet site by staff.
- Training on the CHP has been provided to frontline staff within services
- An internal complaints handling group has been in place historically and has been refreshed for 2017.

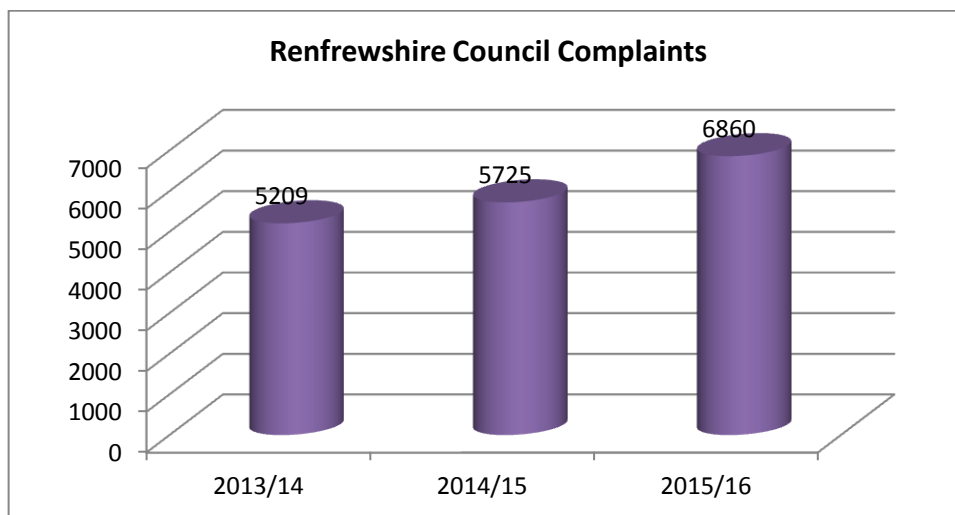
3.7 Regular improvement activity is undertaken to review and update the Council's approach to complaints handling, as required. Improvement activities which have been targeted for 2017 are detailed in Section 7.

4. Complaints handling performance

4.1 Councils are required to report their complaints handling performance against a range of high-level performance indicators related to the SPSO complaints handling procedure. Appendix 1 details Renfrewshire Council's complaints performance for 2015/16 against these key SPSO performance indicators.

- 4.2 Similar to other local authorities, Renfrewshire Council has experienced a steady rise in the number of complaints received which rose from 5725 in 2014/15 to 6,860 in 2015/16.

Table 1



- 4.3 Officers within the organisation are active in national benchmarking groups and review internal complaints handling performance levels against comparator organisations. It is evident from this work that local authorities are seeing a sustained increase in the number of complaints handled by their organisation, which was anticipated in 2013 following the introduction of the SPSO model complaints handling procedure. The model encourages and indeed facilitates enhanced recording of local authority complaints, requiring for example all front line complaints to be recorded and included within performance reports. Previously performance indicators relating to complaints included only defined "formal complaints" received by the local authority. This is supported by data analysis which indicates that 97% of all complaints recorded by the Council in 2015/16 were handled at the front line resolution stage.
- 4.4 The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the local population is also small, with 7 complaints received per 1000 population. This has increased since 2013 from 3.25 per 1000 population, and the reasons for this will be reviewed as part of a scheduled review of the CHP during 2017.
- 4.5 Complaints handling performance remains very strong within Renfrewshire Council. 82% of frontline complaints and 94% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales, representing increased performance from 74% and 91% respectively in 2014/15.

4.6 In addition:

- The average time to respond to a frontline complaint was 3.9 days in 15/16 improving from 5.7 days in 2014/15;
- The average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 12.6 days, improving from 13.2 days in 2014/15 and well within the target of 20 days set by SPSO.

4.7 In November 2016, the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board considered a report relating to the SPSO annual report for 2015/16. The SPSO will not generally consider a complaint in relation to a local authority unless the complainer has gone through the Council's complaints procedure. During the period of the report the SPSO determined 52 complaints relative to Renfrewshire compared with 62 in 2014/15 and 57 in 2013/14. Of the 52 complaints determined by the SPSO during 2015/16, none were fully investigated, only one was partly upheld and none were the subject of a report to the Scottish Parliament. The SPSO indicates that a low uphold rate suggests a robustness in the authority's handling of complaints.

5. Analysis of complaints

5.1 As outlined in Section 3 above, complaints relating to social care services are not included within the SPSO model CHP, and SPSO performance indicators relating to complaints do not include complaints about these services.

5.2 Analysis of all complaints received indicates that the proportion of complaints received by each service area is broadly reflective of the nature and volume of service provided by each service. For example, as is illustrated in the table below, Community Resources responded to 72% of complaints received, in relation to service areas such as:

- Refuse bin collections;
- Special uplift service;
- Repairs not completed within timescales; and
- Street lighting

Table 2 – Proportion of complaints received by the Council broken down by service

Service	Proportion of complaints received in 2015/16	Proportion of Frontline Complaints Received	Proportion of Investigation Complaints Received
Chief Executives	0.1%	0.1%	0%
Children's Services	1.6%	1.59%	0.05%
Community	72%	72%	0.16%

Resources			
Development & Housing	15%	15.1%	0.23%
Finance & Resources	12%	10.1%	2.42%

- 5.3 Community Resources delivers the highest volume of front line council services. These include: refuse collection, roads maintenance, streetscene and land services, parks and cemeteries, street lighting, housing repairs and community safety wardens. It is to be expected therefore that Community Resources will receive the highest level of customer feedback which is often resolved at the frontline stage. When put into context the number of complaints received in relation to the level of service provided continues to be low. For example, the number of complaints about missed waste collections is less than 0.1% of the total number of collections made.

6. Using complaints handling data to improve service delivery

- 6.1 Following an internal review of complaints handling performance, Community Resources increased the use of proactive communications to the public to keep them informed and thereby reducing the need for complaints to be made by customers due to lack of information. For example, Community Resources provide regular updates on winter maintenance and gritting information through social media. Information on delays to waste collections are also provided via social media and to the Customer Service Centre to ensure customers are provided with updates, thereby preventing enquiries and complaints from being made unnecessarily. Community Resources will continue to monitor the success of such measures, whilst analysing the source of complaints and taking appropriate action to minimise these.
- 6.2 Development and Housing Services (DHS) carried out a review of the complaints process across the service and identified areas where improvements could be made, both to benefit internal process but ultimately to provide a more effective service for customers. As a result, Lagan-based complaints handling was rolled out across the full service in October and November 2016 and training was given to the appropriate officers. In addition, the complaints process has been highlighted in articles in the DHS staff newsletter, In the Loop, and also as the 'spotlight' screen saver for DHS employees. These measures help to ensure that employees are confident about how to deal with complaints effectively.

7 Continuous improvement of the complaints handling process

- 7.1 Renfrewshire Council is committed to continuous improvement driven by intelligence gathered through complaints. In 2016, an internal working group undertook an audit of correspondence in order to assess compliance with the Council's CHP. This was a very positive exercise, with the findings indicating

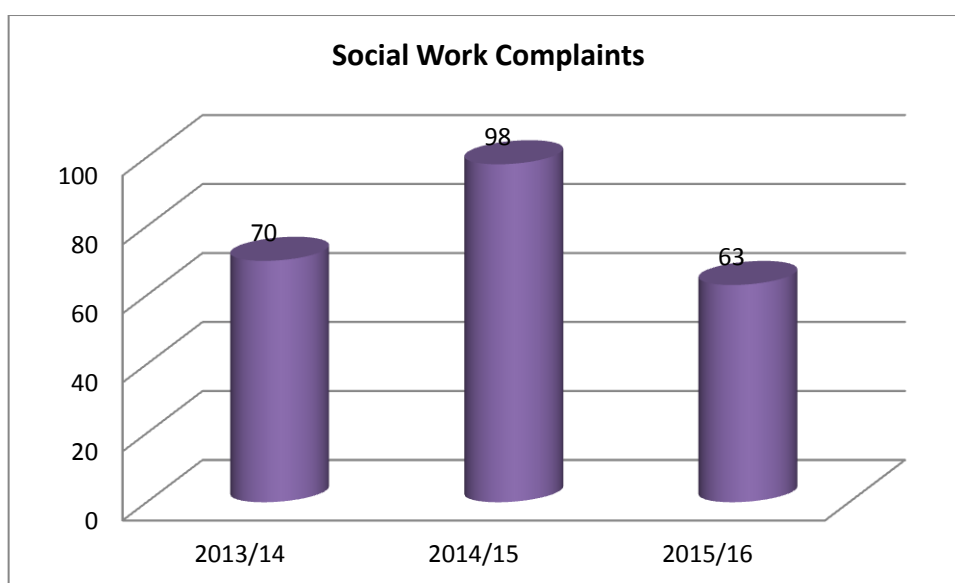
a good level of knowledge and experience of the CHP across the Council. There were very good examples of complaints response letters, and learning that could be shared across services.

- 7.2 Opportunities for development were identified through the audit, particularly in relation to reviewing the current system used to monitor complaints across services, reviewing sample letters and templates, and consideration of reviewing current training offered to employees on the CHP given the significant level of change which has occurred across Council services during the last 3 years.
- 7.3 To take these forward, a cross service working group has been established. This group will ensure that as a Council we continue to build on good practice and ensure continuous improvement and learning in the approach to correspondence and complaints from customers.

8. Social Work Complaints

- 8.1 Complaints relating to the provision of social work services are handled through a separate, but complementary process to the Council's complaints handling procedure. This is due to the existing legislation in place relating to the handling of social work complaints. Both Children's Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership which provide social work services, endeavour to acknowledge complaints within 3 working days, to process complaints and reply to complaints within 20 working days or within 28 days with agreement of the client and in line with the current legislation for more complex complaints. Customers who remain unhappy with the complaint can appeal to the Director of Social Work or the Chief Executive if the Director has already been involved in the complaint. If they are still unhappy they may have their complaint reviewed by the Social Work Complaints Review Committee (CRC). Finally after the Social Work complaints process has been exhausted the complaint can be referred to the SPSO.
- 8.2 In order to align to the Council complaints handling process all social work complaints are measured against the 20 day timescale, rather than the discretionary 28 day limit prescribed in legislation. 63 social work complaints were received in 2015/16. Of the 63 complaints, 73% were processed on time. Child Care and Criminal Justice received 24 complaints and 71% of these were processed on time. The Health and Social Care Partnership (Social Work only) received 39 complaints and 74% were completed on time.
- 8.3 Table 3 below illustrates the number of social work complaints received over the last 3 years, with a spike in 2014/15, and numbers returning in 2015/16 to 2013/14 levels.

Table 3



- 8.4 The CRC for handling the final internal stage of social work complaints is made up of a panel of independent lay people. The CRC hear from the complainant in person and/or by a written submission as well as hearing evidence from social care staff. They then consider the decision made by the service and can overrule the decisions made by social care staff. In 2015/16 a total of 3 complaints were referred to CRC, none of which overturned the original decision made by the service.
- 8.5 In March 2016, the Scottish Parliament approved the Public Services Reform (Social Work Complaints Procedure) (Scotland) Order 2016, which saw the removal of provisions for social work complaints in the Scotland Act 1968. This order allows a model Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP), prepared by SPSO to be produced. It also saw the amendment of the Scottish Public Services Act 2002, to allow the SPSO to investigate complaints in relation to the substance of Social Work decisions. In effect, this means that the current statutory Social Work complaints procedure, including CRCs, will be abolished, and new procedures will be developed in line with the handling of complaints for other public sector services. The SPSO's model CHP will be fully implemented from 1 April 2017.
- 8.6 All complaints prior to the 1 April 2017 will follow the historical social work complaints handling process. This means in effect for the year 2016/17 the 2 complaints processes will be running in parallel, which is likely to affect a very small number of complaints.
- 8.7 It is anticipated that the introduction of the new Social Work CHP will see an increase in the number of complaints logged, as front line resolution complaints will be recorded for the first time. This would be in line with the Council's experience in 2013 when its new CHP was introduced.

- 8.8 Although the implementation of the new social work CHP will be challenging, it represents an opportunity to reconfigure how complaints are handled, improve the knowledge of staff at all levels on dealing with complaints and using complaints to drive continuous improvement

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community Planning** – none.
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets** – none
6. **Information Technology** – none
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report as it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** - none
9. **Procurement** - none
10. **Risk** - none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none

List of Background Papers – n/a

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Appendix 1: Renfrewshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2015/16 SPSO Indicators



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Priority 01. The total number of complaints received per thousand population







Short Name	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	Value	Value	Value
Total number of complaints received	5,209	5,725	6,860
Total number of complaints received per 1000 population	3.25	7.25	7

Priority 02. Complaints closed at stage 1 and stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints closed







Short Name	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	5,007	5,441	5,077
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	225	198	178
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	20	5	5
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints	95.68%	97.2%	96.62%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints	4.33%	3.5%	3.4%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation as a percentage of all complaints	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%

Priority 03. The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed at each stage

Short Name	Short Term Trend Arrow	Long Term Trend Arrow	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
			Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1	↑	↑	71.53%	74.3%	85.46%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1	↓	↓	16.13%	17.5%	8.99%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage1	↑	↓	12.38%	8.3%	5.55%
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↑	↑	37.5%	36.9%	24.85%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↓	↓	37.28%	51.5%	61.08%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↑	↑	25.23%	11.6%	14.08%

Short Name	Short Term Trend Arrow	Long Term Trend Arrow	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
			Value	Value	Value
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints at stage 2			2.85%	2.17%	0.93%
Number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2			3.75%	6.82%	1.05%
Number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2			1.68%	0%	0.65%





Priority 04. The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

Short Name	Short Term Trend Arrow	Long Term Trend Arrow	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
			Value	Value	Value
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1			3.43	5.7	3.9
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2			12.83	13.2	12.6
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation			8.75	10.8	1.9

Priority 05. The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were responded to in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days

Short Name	Short Term Trend Arrow	Long Term Trend Arrow	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
			Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as a percentage of the total number of stage one complaints	↑	↑	82.08%	73.83%	81.5%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints	↑	↑	90.83%	89.37%	93.85%
Number of escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints	↓	↓	7.13%	0.5%	1.98%

Priority 06. The number and percentage of complaints at each state where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised

Short Name	Short Term Trend Arrow	Long Term Trend Arrow	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
			Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at stage 1			1.7%	1.23%	0.13%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2			4.25%	0%	1.18%