

**To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board**

**On: 16 March 2020**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: 2018/19 Complaints Data**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 Renfrewshire Council's complaint handling procedure (CHP) helps the Council to improve services and processes based on customer feedback. It is one of a range of methods to help the Council understand how well it is delivering its services.
- 1.2 Introduced in 2013, the Council's CHP complies with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) guidance and aims to help 'get it right first time'. The expectation is to have quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with early resolution by capable, well-trained staff. As part of the procedure, all complaints are recorded and monitored.
- 1.3 This report provides information on complaints closed during the year from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 and performance on key indicators, as well as highlighting improvements made to the CHP over the past year to ensure that complaints are handled well and the organisation learns from them.
- 1.4 The key messages highlighted in the report are as follows:
  - 8,200 complaints were received in 2018/19, which has increased from 6,752 in 2017/18, as set out in section 4.8;
  - 89% of our complaints dealt with are frontline resolution, demonstrating the Council's commitment to getting it right first time in response to complaints;
  - 77.5% of frontline complaints and 73.9% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales;

- the average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 15 days, which is within the SPSO target of 20 days;
- a number of improvements to the Council's CHP have been implemented since the 2018 review;
- 0.5% of our complaints for 2018/19 were reported to the SPSO, of the 47 reported, one was upheld and one was partly upheld. The SPSO indicates that a low uphold rate suggests a robustness in the authority's handling of complaints;
- 2018/19 breakdown of complaints received by services is broadly reflective of the volume of services provided, with Environment and Infrastructure Services delivering the highest volume of frontline Council services and consequently receiving the highest volume of customer interactions;
- the internal review identified the requirement to revise the CHP and an opportunity to update the provision of training and guidelines for officers, for social work complaints to be in line with the council-wide procedure and for a more robust system to support the logging of and learning from complaints; and
- the next stage of the complaints review will be to drive improvement and improve performance, which will be underpinned by a new council-wide system. The internal communication plan and training will emphasise this.

1.5 A case study and performance scorecard have been included within the appendices of this report to provide additional context and data.

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## **2. Recommendations**

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

- Note the content of this report

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## **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 at that time.
- 3.2 The 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 target 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 In line with the model SPSO complaints handling procedure, Renfrewshire Council's CHP uses a two-stage process, Frontline Resolution and Investigation stage:

### **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 where a customer has provided evidence to verify their claim for benefits, but the Benefits Service has not updated their case records with this information. When this is reported, the service would apologise, update the customer's benefit record to record receipt of evidence and check that the benefit award is corrected from the appropriate date.

### **Investigation**

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Investigation complaints are typically complex or require a detailed examination before resolving. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing 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.

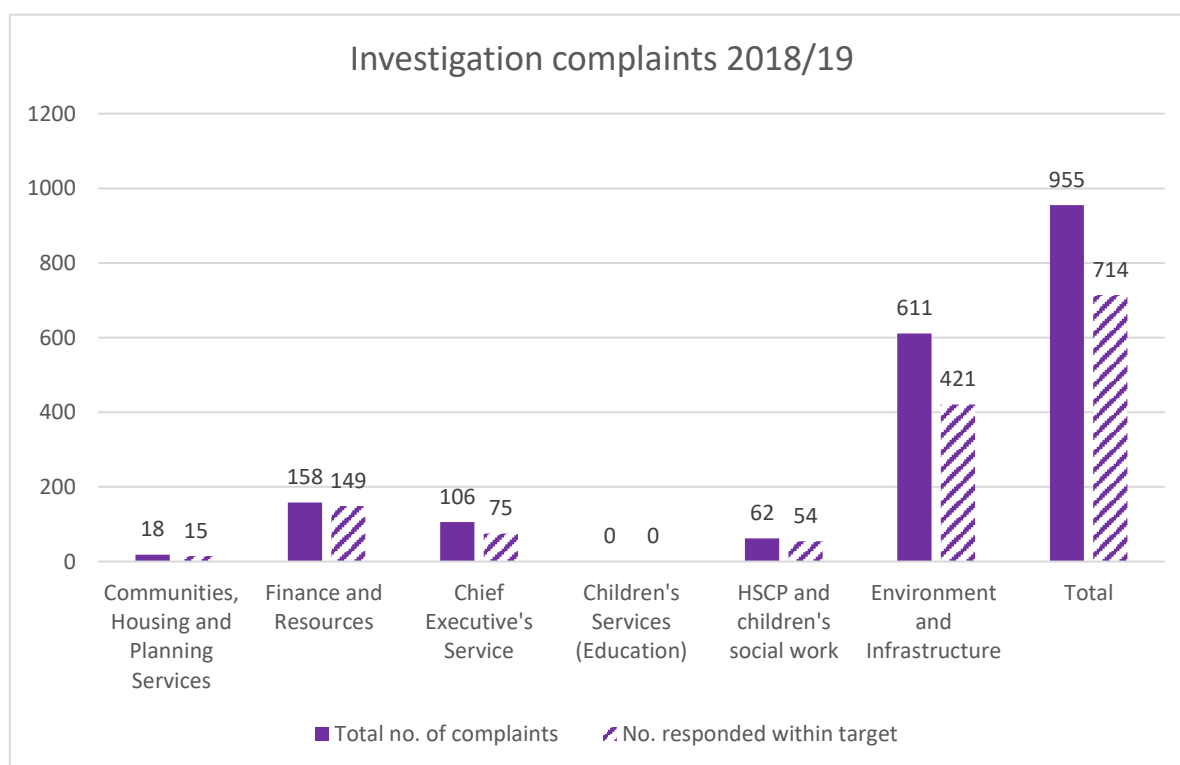
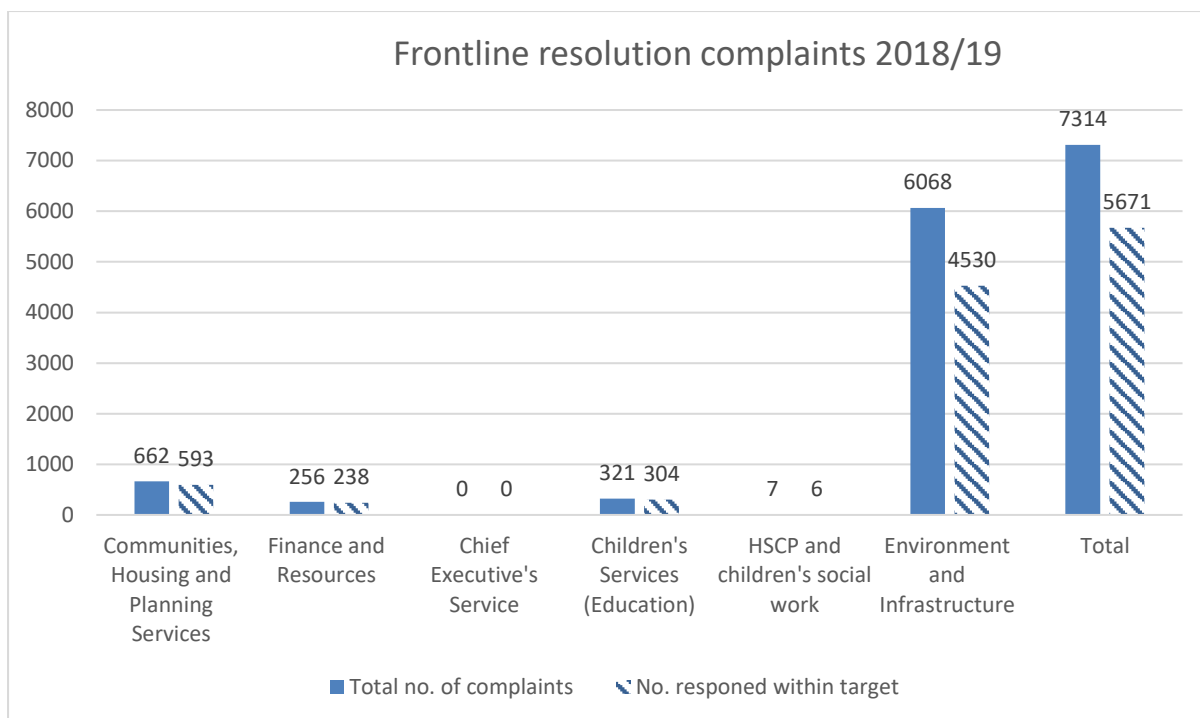
- 3.5 In line with other authorities, our complaints policy does not include a number of service areas that are processed through other means, some examples include: the right to appeal a refusal of planning permission or to appeal planning conditions - this is made to the Local Review Body or the Scottish Ministers; allegations of bullying are treated and investigated as bullying incidents - by the education establishment; and a compensation claim for personal injury, loss of or damage to property - are processed through the Council's standard 'Public Liability Claim Form'.

## **4. 2018/19 Council performance**

- 4.1 Complaints are crucial in identifying areas or processes that need to be improved for our customers and councils are required to report their complaints handling performance against a range of high-level performance indicators related to the SPSO complaints handling procedure. This report provides information on the complaints closed during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 and Appendix 2

details Renfrewshire Council's complaints performance for 2018/19 against these key SPSO performance indicators.

- 4.2 As reported previously to this Board, a review of complaints handling procedures and performance commenced in 2018, with revised Complaints Handling Procedure approved by the Finance, Resources and Customer Service Policy Board in March 2019. The review identified a requirement to move to a single system for complaints, streamlining the process and ensuring consistent reporting across the Council. This will also strengthen the complaints data and support greater analysis and learning. Development of this system was undertaken during 2019 and it will be in place from 1 April 2020. In the interim, work has taken place to address variances in recording wherever possible, and updated information has been provided in the appendix, based on this approach.
- 4.3 In 2018/19, the number of complaints received increased from 6,752 to 8,200. This can largely be attributed to an increase in waste complaints in Quarter 4 (January to March 2019). Elected members will be aware of the significant programme of change that was implemented during late 2018 and early 2019 in relation to waste collection.
- 4.4 The Council strives to ensure that complaints are answered right first time and customers are responded to quickly, and during 2018/19 89% of complaints were addressed through frontline resolution. 77.5% of frontline complaints and 73.9% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales. The average time to respond to a frontline resolution complaint was 5.3 days, which is slightly above the SPSO target of 5 days. The average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 15 days, which is within the SPSO target of 20 days.
- 4.5 From 1 April 2017, the process for handling social work complaints was brought into line with the council-wide complaints process. There is still a minor difference between the two procedures - under the social work procedure frontline complaints may be extended by up to 10 working days in agreement with the complainant. This extension was not applied to any complaints in 2018/19.
- 4.6 As all 2017/18 and 2018/19 social work complaints were handled under the new procedure the data has been included in the service charts below. The 69 complaints across social work services relate to services provided by Children's Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Social Work Children's Services received 20 complaints, and all were processed on time whilst the HSCP received 49 complaints and 39 (79%) were completed on time.



- 4.7 Overall the breakdown of complaints received by services is broadly reflective of the volume of services provided. Environment and Infrastructure delivers the highest volume of frontline Council services, which includes: refuse collection, roads maintenance, Streetscene and land services, parks and cemeteries and street lighting. It is to be expected therefore that the service will receive the highest level of customer interactions. There was also an increase in investigation complaints experienced by this service in 2018/19, due to strengthening complaints recording, as well as major waste service changes during December 2018.

- 4.8 A case study has been provided in Appendix 1 on how complaints and correspondence were managed during a period of significant change for waste services last year. It is important to note the scale of this service provision, with over 11 million waste and recycling collections made each year, complaints about service delivery account for only 0.1% of the actual services delivered reflecting very high levels of general satisfaction. Forecasted analysis of the 2019/20 data indicates that complaint levels relating to waste services are back in line with 2017/18 year's performance.

## **5. Complaints escalating to SPSO**

- 5.1 In January 2020, the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board considered a report relating to the SPSO annual report for 2018/19. The SPSO will not generally consider a complaint in relation to a local authority unless the complainant has gone through the Council's complaints procedure. During the period of the report the SPSO determined 47 complaints relative to Renfrewshire Council (out of a total of 8,200) compared with 48 in 2017/18. Of the 47 complaints determined by the SPSO during 2018/19, one was upheld, and one was partly upheld.
- 5.2 The SPSO undertook a review on their own guidance and model complaints handling procedure. Following this some adjustments have been made to the national procedure which councils will be required to adopt from 1 April 2020. The Council's own policy will be updated to reflect this, with guidance provided to staff.

## **6. Improving the Council's complaints handling procedure**

- 6.1 In 2018, a review was undertaken on our CHP. The findings of the review were reported to the Finance, Resources & Customer Services Policy Board on 16 March 2019. Since then the following actions have been completed:
- the publication of the refreshed complaints handling procedure and staff guide on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019.
  - a team brief was issued in April 2019 to all employees.
  - further guidance on complaints handling has been made available on the intranet, for all employees, which also includes guidance on dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
  - the Complaints Development Working Group has continued to meet quarterly.
  - learning and benchmarking opportunities have been pursued through the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) and directly with other councils on their approach to complaint handling and reporting, a specific example has been the recording of missed bins as a front-line resolution complaint or service request.
  - social work related complaints are now being dealt with using the council-wide procedure.
  - review process identified several procedural issues in relation to the recording and reporting of complaints and provided an opportunity to address these through the revised CHP and the operational processes which underpin this. The 2017/18 data has been recalibrated to ensure robust baseline data is in place to assist

with the scrutiny of performance and consistent with the methodology applied for the 2018/19 data.

- the internal review identified the requirement to revise the CHP and an opportunity to update the provision of training and guidelines for officers, for social work complaints to be in line with the council-wide procedure and for a more robust system to support the logging of and learning from complaints.

## **7. Next Steps**

- 7.1 The next stage of the complaints review will be to improve complaints performance and to use analysis of complaints to help drive service delivery and process improvements. This work will be underpinned and enabled by the adoption of the new council-wide system, rolling out from 1 April 2020. Benchmarking work will continue, including aligning reporting with other authorities through the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network. A revised model complaints handling procedure was published by the SPSO in January 2020, with councils required to fully implement the new procedure by 1 April 2021, as mentioned in section 5 of this report the Council's own policy and staff guidance will be updated to reflect this.

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## **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - none
3. **Community/Council Planning** –  
*We consider our services performance against a number of strategic outcomes to measure how we are delivering better outcomes for our local communities:*
  - *Working together to improve outcomes* – complaints are monitored under this outcome of the Council Plan and service improvement planning process.
4. **Legal** - none.
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none.
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - 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 because 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
- 12.          **Cosla Policy Position** – none
- 13.          **Climate Risk-** none

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**List of Background Papers: none**

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# Take 5

## Case Study on waste complaints

### 1: What change did the service make?

The redesign changed how waste and recycling is collected from households and businesses across Renfrewshire, increasing quality and quantity of recycling whilst reducing costs. The move from fortnightly collections to three-weekly residual and four-weekly separated recycling, was the largest service change implemented in recent years, completely re-routing 90,000 households and 1,200 commercial waste collections.

As with any service change of this scale, a period of lower performance was expected while the changes were embedded and the public adapted to the changed service. A range of measures were planned to support both our customers and our employees through the change, anticipating this increase in enquiries and complaints

### 2: How did we support our customers?

All households received bespoke calendars and information packs in advance of the change. We launched the new website for calendar collection information with 'download to smartphone' capability and an email reminder service. Roadshows took place in communities to engage with the public face to face and explain the changes. There was also an increase in the use of social media to communicate the changes.

Additional training and resources were provided to assist Customer Contact Centre employees to handle increased call volumes, including re-skilling other Contact Centre employees and the establishment of a dedicated email address for the waste-related enquiries.

### 3: What was the impact?

Teams from Environment and Infrastructure and the Customer Contact Centre worked closely together before and during the changes.

They closely monitored the impact and ensured close communication between both teams throughout in order to deal with any emerging issues.

Analysis shows that:

- 900 frontline complaints about waste services were received in January 2019, compared to 249 in January 2018 and 267 in January 2020; and
- 14,419 customer service centre calls relating to waste were received in November and December 2018, compared to 5,033 from the same period in 2017.

### 4: Why did customers complain?

Analysis of the complaints shows that for January 2019 almost 80% of waste complaints were down to non-collection of bins.

The second largest area of complaints in January 2019 at almost 5% related to the in the delivery of new bins.

The remaining 15% of waste complaints were routine matters unrelated to the change.

Most of these complaints were dealt with as frontline resolution and were resolved quickly for the customers.

### 5: What lessons have been learned?

The service has used technology-based solutions to improve the response time for missed bins and overall complaints handling.

One solution allows the download of data from systems into useable information first time without requiring manipulation. This is produced in a format that can be quickly distributed to frontline staff for immediate action. This reduces overall response times, offering a quicker resolution for our customers. For example, refuse collectors can now be notified of a missed bin whilst still out on route allowing the service to quickly resolve the complaint.

Forecasted analysis of the 2019/20 data indicates that complaint levels relating to waste services are back in line with 2017/18 year's performance.

## Appendix 2: Renfrewshire Council Annual Complaints Report SPSO Indicators



The total number of complaints received, frontline and investigation	2017/18	2018/19
Total number of complaints received	6,752	8,200
Number of complaints closed at Frontline Resolution as a percentage of all complaints	95.9%	89.1%
Number of complaints closed at Frontline Resolution	6,478	7,307
Number of complaints closed at Investigation	274	893
Number of complaints closed at Investigation after escalation	9	7
Number of complaints closed at Investigation as a percentage of all complaints	4.05%	10.89%
Number of complaints closed at Investigation after escalation as a percentage of all complaints	0.13%	0.8%

<b>The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Frontline Resolution	5.9	5.3
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Investigation	12.7	15
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	20	9

<b>The number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were responded to in full within the set timescales</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Number of complaints closed at Frontline Resolution within 5 working days as a percentage of the total number of Frontline Resolution complaints	72.4%	77.5%
Number of complaints closed at Investigation within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of Investigation complaints	94.96%	73.9%
Number of escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of Investigation complaints	0.62%	0.78%

The number and percentage of complaints where an extension to the timescale has been authorised	2017/18	2018/19
Number of complaints closed at Frontline Resolution where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at Frontline Resolution	0.09%	0.2%
Number of complaints closed at Investigation where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at Investigation	0%	0.6%

Historical data is available for these indicators for some services only, due to the recording system. This will be addressed through the new single system being implemented.