



To: Audit Scrutiny and Petitions Board

On: 30 March 2015

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Annual Complaints report 2013/14

1. Summary

- 1.1 Renfrewshire Council sets high standards for the services it delivers and manages millions of transactions each year. For example, Community Resources carries out over 10 million waste and recycling collections and the customer services unit manages 400,000 phone calls and 40,000 face to face enquiries from the public.
- 1.2 To ensure we know how well we are delivering services, we have implemented a new complaints handling procedure during 2013/14 which reflects Renfrewshire Council's commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of customer complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.
- 1.3 Our procedure complies with the SPSO's guidance on a model complaints handling procedure and aims to help us 'get it right first time'. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by capable, well-trained staff.
- 1.4 Complaints give us valuable information we can use to improve customer satisfaction. Our complaints handling procedure will enable us to address a customer's dissatisfaction and may also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. For our employees, complaints provide a first-hand account of the customer's views and experience, and can highlight problems we may otherwise miss.
- 1.5 Handled well, complaints can give our customers a form of redress when things go wrong, and can also help us continuously improve our services. Resolving complaints early saves money and creates better customer

relations. Sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery as possible means we can deal with them locally and quickly, so they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure.

- 1.6 Renfrewshire Council received 5209 complaints in 2013/14. Through the new procedure, we have been able to capture and analyse more areas of customer dissatisfaction with our services and have used this information to improve services. This report provides information on the complaints Renfrewshire Council received in 2013/14 and show how we have used this information to ensure that the services we deliver are of high quality, efficient and responsive to people needs.
- 1.7 From 2013/14, Councils are required to assess their complaints handling performance around a range of high-level performance indicators related to the SPSO complaints handling procedure. This is designed to help organisations measure how well they are performing against the new procedure, to manage performance and to facilitate benchmarking between organisations to learn from one another and to contribute towards continuous improvement for the customer. The focus is not only on how organisations are performing against the two-stage process but will also aim to capture performance relating to learning derived from complaints and ultimately, how effective an organisation is in using complaints to improve service delivery. Appendix 1 contains a full list of indicators for Renfrewshire.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board:
- Notes the contents of this report
 - Agrees that a quarterly report on complaints performance should be brought to the Audit, Scrutiny and Petitions Board.

3. **Background**

- 3.1 The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 gave the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) the authority to lead the development of a model complaints handling process across the public sector. New guidance was published by SPSO in March 2012 and Councils were asked to implement its recommendations from 1st March 2013. Renfrewshire Council began implementation in October 2012 with full operation of the procedure from 1st March 2013.
- 3.2 The purpose of the new local authority model complaints handling process is to provide a standardised approach to dealing with customer complaints across the local authority sector. The aim is to implement a consistent process for customers to follow which makes it simpler to complain, ensures staff and customer confidence in complaints handling and encourages bodies to make best use of lessons from complaints.

- 3.3 A key element of the policy is the requirement to monitor and log all complaints coming into the authority and use this information to drive service improvement.
- 3.4 Complaints within this new policy are defined as: *‘An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the local authority’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the local authority.’*
- 3.5 In line with SPSO recommendations, the new policy uses a two stage process, removing the current appeals stage. The two new definitions for complaints are:

Stage 1: Frontline resolution

Frontline resolution 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.

Stage 2: Investigation

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at that 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 our final position.

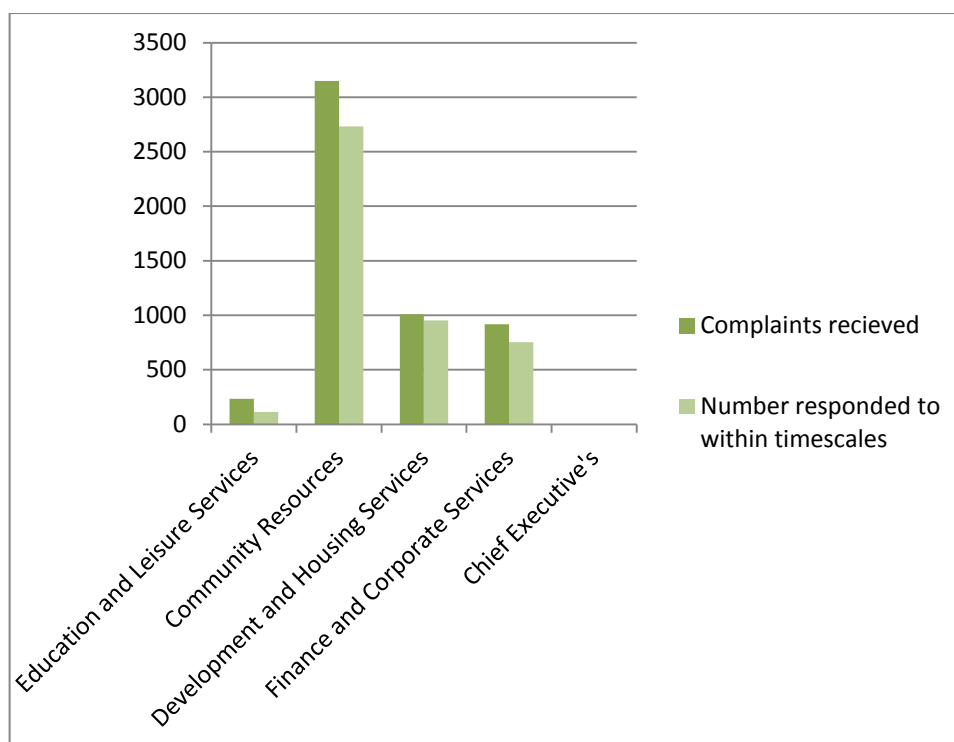
The Council has **20 days** to respond to these complaints.

- 3.6 The new policy applies to all local authorities and all local authority services (including arms length organisations) with the exception of social work services. Guidance on social work complaints is due to be published over the next year and revised guidance will be published for Social Work staff in due course.
- 3.7 Appendix 1 contains a full summary of the SPSO performance indicators. In summary:
- Renfrewshire Council received 5209 complaints in 2013/14

- 96% of these complaints were handled at the frontline stage, showing that we are being responsive to initial reports of dissatisfaction about complaints
- 82% of complaints at frontline and 90% of investigation were completed within target timescales
- The average time to respond to a frontline complaint was 3.43 days
- The average time to respond to an investigation level complaint was 12.83 days
- 72% of complaints were upheld at frontline and 37% at investigation stage.

3.8 Key areas of complaints were:

Key complaint area	What we are doing to address issues
1. Complaints relating to grass cutting, trees and other grounds maintenance issues during the summer months	The Service is working with the Customer Service Centre and is aiming to improve communication and information provided to customers to better manage expectations of service delivery.
2. Special uplifts	Improved scrutiny of the number of requests and allocation of work will ensure uplifts are completed within timescale.
3. Waste bin collections	A number of complaints are received relating to waste collections, however, this relates to 0.02% of bin collections in Renfrewshire. By analysing the complaints received, service managers are able to identify and pinpoint areas of service dissatisfaction and, where possible, put measures in place to prevent recurrence.
4. Housing repairs not completed within target times	There are a number of complaints relating to delays in housing repairs, 94% of housing repairs are completed within target timescales. We work closely with contractors to monitor volume and type of repairs and adjust resource accordingly to improve performance on this indicator, however, there will always be occasions where the target timescale is not achieved (for example due to the complexity of repair / weather conditions etc). The Council will continue to look for opportunities to improve this area of work.
5. Delays in processing housing benefit claims	New processes have been implemented to improve response times and a new capacity grid is currently being rolled out which will identify target areas for improvement and staff training.



3.9 As a result of analysing these complaints, a range of improvements to services have taken place to improve customer experience and to ensure problems do not happen again. Noted below are a range of improvements which have been made during 2013/14:

What the customer said	What we did
A number of complaints were made in relation to the length of time customers waited to receive their council tax refunds	A new process has now been set up to prioritise refunds that have been requested to ensure they are issued within a reasonable time. In addition, changes have been made to the information given to customers on timescales for council tax refunds – this has been changed from 5-10 days to 21 days. This has aligned customers' expectations more closely to our timescales and has resulted in reduced complaints.
A number of complaints were made about lack of clarity around payments for Council Tax not being allocated to the correct financial year when a customer uses the automated payment line	Improvements have been made to the standard messages on the customer payment line to better inform customers of options and to make the instructions clearer.
There were issues around clarity of letters relating to benefit entitlements	A new letter has been created for customers when their benefit entitlement has been recalculated following an overpayment to save misinterpretation and subsequent complaints.

There have been a number of complaints relating to bullying in schools.	Schools were reminded to follow the current Tackling Bullying policy. In addition to this, there is currently a policy review taking place to update the policy.
There have been complaints from members of the public regarding pupils loitering and leaving litter at properties.	The school involved has reiterated to all pupils that this is unacceptable. There are now community wardens and senior members of staff from the school have been patrolling the area at break times.
Complaints regarding investigating fire damaged properties	The Council has implemented a revised process for investigating fire damaged properties. Some of the changes implemented were suggested by the customer involved in the complaint and feedback was provided to the customer that we had made changes to the process taking their views into account.
When staff were setting up a Direct Debit, there was no ability to check that the sort codes were correct. This meant that some errors were made resulting in customers payments not being taken from their bank account	A Bank Sort Code On line checker was made available to staff and put on the system to ensure accuracy.
Customer's appointments not being checked correctly leading to the service not being provided when expected	Staff were advised to check all appointments with customers when they originally make the appointment and if they phone back for any other information
A complaints was received by a primary school, from a parent, regarding travel arrangements for schools trips	The school has reviewed its procedures in relation to school trips.
Improving customer information when calling regarding to grass cutting, trees and other grounds maintenance issues during the summer months and bin collections	Community Resources continue to work with the call centre to advise of specific issues relating to grass cutting, trees, special uplifts and waste bin collections to try and reduce front line complaints. This involves advising of any seasonal issues and delays in service which may affect customers.
If customer did not have rent account number when making a payment they were transferred to their Neighbourhood Office to obtain this information and then transferred back to the CSU which caused complaints.	Staff have been given training on how to search for a Rent Account number on the payment system, enabling the customer's issue to be dealt with immediately.

4 Social Work Complaints

- 4.1 Social Work currently manages complaints differently from the rest of the Council due to the legislative framework that sets out how complaints are

processed. Social Work endeavours to acknowledge complaints within 3 working days and reply to complaints within 10 working days, or within 20 days with agreement of the client for more complex complaints. Anyone who is still 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. Finally if they are still unhappy they may have their complaint reviewed by the Social Work Complaints Review Committee (CRC).

4.2 Until the necessary changes to legislation are passed, the service continues to process complaints through this 3 stage process. The Scottish Government has conducted national consultation on potential changes and is proposing to bring Social Work complaints into line with other Council Services. This would involve moving to a 20 working day investigation phase and the Social Work CRC being replaced by SPSO. The necessary changes in legislation will take around 2 years to complete.

4.3 During 2013/14, Social Work received 70 formal complaints. The main areas of complaint were Child Care (34%), Care at Home (17%), and Occupational Therapy (12%). Of the 70 complaints received by the service, the main two areas of complaint related to Standards of Service and Looked after Children. Standards of Service represented 39% (27 complaints) and related to when customers felt that services received and had not met their expectations. Looked after Children 17% (12 complaints) relate to Social Work's statutory duty to support children in its care and is a highly emotive area. The majority of complaints relate to dissatisfaction regarding levels of contact between parents and accommodated children. This can be attributed to a core difference in expectations of parents versus the professional view of an appropriate and safe level of contact.

5.0 Customer satisfaction monitoring

5.1 The Council is eager to understand how this new procedure is working for customers and conducted satisfaction monitoring during the year. The aim was to find out about people's experience of the complaints process so that we could identify areas for improvement.

5.2 33 responses were returned to the Council and key findings were:

- 85% of customers felt it was easy to log their complaint
- 59% of customers were satisfied with the way in which staff handled their complaint
- When a complaint took longer than expected to resolve, 81% of customers felt they were not kept up to date
- 73% of customers felt their response was clear and easy to understand
- Overall, 50% of customers were satisfied with the process

5.3 The key area for improvement coming from this research is keeping customers up to date when there is a delay to resolution. This will be addressed over the coming period and improvements identified and implemented.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - none
3. **Community Planning –**
 - Children and Young People** – The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
 - Community Care, Health & Well-being** - The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
 - Empowering our Communities** - The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
 - Greener** - The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
 - Jobs and the Economy** - The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
 - Safer and Stronger** - The Chief Executive’s Service will support services and partners to meet the targets set out in the Community Plan.
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

List of Background Papers

Complaints procedure, November 2012, Council

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Renfrewshire Council Annual Complaints Report SPSO Indicators



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

Short Name	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14				Q2 2013/14				Q3 2013/14				Q4 2013/14			
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Total number of complaints received	↑	↓	1,401	1,357	1,158	1,293	5,209											
Total number of complaints received per 1000 population	↑	↑	4	3	2	4	3.25											

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

Short Name	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14				Q2 2013/14				Q3 2013/14				Q4 2013/14			
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value

	Term Trend	Term Trend	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	↑	↑	1,362	1,286	1,105	1,254	5,007
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	↓	↓	45	78	62	40	225
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	↓	↓	4	7	8	1	20
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints	↑	↑	96.8%	94.3%	94.7%	96.9%	95.68%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints	↓	↓	3.2	5.7	5.3	3.1	4.33
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation as a percentage of all complaints	↓	↓	0.3%	0.5%	0.7%	0.1%	0.4%

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

	Q1 2013/14 Q2 2013/14 Q3 2013/14 Q4 2013/14 2013/14							
Short Name	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14	Q2 2013/14	Q3 2013/14	Q4 2013/14	2013/14	2013/14
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1	↓	↓	80.5%	71.9%	69.5%	64.2%	71.53%	





Short Name	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14				Q2 2013/14				Q3 2013/14				Q4 2013/14				2013/14			
			Q1 2013/14		Q2 2013/14		Q3 2013/14		Q4 2013/14		Q1 2013/14		Q2 2013/14		Q3 2013/14		Q4 2013/14		2013/14		2013/14	
			Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend	Value	Trend
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1	↑	↑	12.5%	↑	15.2%	↑	15.8%	↑	21%	↑	12.5%	↑	15.2%	↑	15.8%	↑	21%	↑	16.13%	↑	16.13%	↑
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1	↑	↑	7%	↑	13%	↑	14.7%	↑	14.8%	↑	7%	↑	13%	↑	14.7%	↑	14.8%	↑	12.38%	↑	12.38%	↑
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↑	↑	37.8%	↑	42.3%	↑	27.4%	↑	42.5%	↑	37.8%	↑	42.3%	↑	27.4%	↑	42.5%	↑	37.5%	↑	37.5%	↑
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↓	↓	33.3%	↓	33.3%	↓	50%	↓	32.5%	↓	33.3%	↓	33.3%	↓	50%	↓	32.5%	↓	37.28%	↓	37.28%	↓
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↑	↓	28.9%	↓	24.4%	↓	22.6%	↓	25%	↓	28.9%	↓	24.4%	↓	22.6%	↓	25%	↓	25.23%	↓	25.23%	↓
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints at stage 2	↓	↓	4.4%	↓	3.8%	↓	3.2%	↓	0%	↓	4.4%	↓	3.8%	↓	3.2%	↓	0%	↓	2.85%	↓	2.85%	↓
Number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↓	↓	2.2%	↓	3.8%	↓	6.5%	↓	2.5%	↓	2.2%	↓	3.8%	↓	6.5%	↓	2.5%	↓	3.75%	↓	3.75%	↓
Number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↓	↓	2.2%	↓	1.3%	↓	3.2%	↓	0%	↓	2.2%	↓	1.3%	↓	3.2%	↓	0%	↓	1.68%	↓	1.68%	↓

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





Short Name	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14	Q2 2013/14	Q3 2013/14	Q4 2013/14	Q1 2013/14	Q2 2013/14	Q3 2013/14	Q4 2013/14	Q1 2013/14
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1	↑	↓	2.5	3.9	3.8	3.5					3.43
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2	↑	↓	8.1	11.9	23.4	7.9					12.83
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	↓	↓	0.5	6.1	23.4	5					8.75

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	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14	Q2 2013/14	Q3 2013/14	Q4 2013/14	Q1 2013/14	Q2 2013/14	Q3 2013/14	Q4 2013/14	Q1 2013/14
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	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	↓	↓	86.9%	78.4%	80.9%	82.1%					82.08%

Short Name	Q1 2013/14 Q2 2013/14 Q3 2013/14 Q4 2013/14 Q4 2013/14 2013/14									
	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14		Q2 2013/14		Q3 2013/14		Q4 2013/14	
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints			95.6%		89.7%		85.5%		92.5%	90.83%
Number of escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints			8.9%		9%		8.1%		2.5%	7.13%

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	Q1 2013/14 Q2 2013/14 Q3 2013/14 Q4 2013/14 Q4 2013/14 2013/14									
	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Q1 2013/14		Q2 2013/14		Q3 2013/14		Q4 2013/14	
			Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at stage 1					1%		3.1%		1%	1.7%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2					0%		8.1%		2.5%	4.25%