
To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 19 March 2018

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Annual Complaints Report 2016/17

1. Summary and Key Messages

- 1.1. Renfrewshire Council's complaint handling procedure (CHP) ensures that 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 external complaints Renfrewshire Council received in 2016/17 from members of the public 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:
- 6,364 complaints were received in 2016/17, which is a reduction from 6,860 in 2015/16.
 - The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the local population is also small, with 6.75 complaints received per 1000 population; this has decreased since 2015/16 from 7 per 1000 population.

- 97% (6,184) of complaints were handled at the frontline stage demonstrating that the Council is highly responsive to initial reports of dissatisfaction from customers.
- Overall, 76.7% of frontline complaints were closed within target timescales. The average time taken to respond to frontline complaints received was 5.2 days, this is an increase from 2015/16 where it was 3.9 days and is slightly above the SPSO target of 5 days.
- Overall 92.8% (168) of investigation complaints were completed within target timescales. The average time taken to respond to an investigation complaint received was 13.2 days, which is slightly higher than in 2015/16 when it was 12.6 days. However, it is still well within the target set by the SPSO of 20 working days.
- 36% of complaints received at the investigation were upheld, compared to 25% in 2015/16
- Only a very small number of complaints received are escalated to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for investigation. In 2016/17, 49 complaints were received by the SPSO in relation to Renfrewshire, out of a total of 5586 nationally. Of these 49, five were investigated, with three being fully upheld, one partially upheld and one not upheld. The SPSO indicates that a low uphold rate suggests a robustness in the authority's handling of complaints.
- The breakdown of complaints received by services is broadly reflective of the nature and volume of service provided. For example, a significant proportion of complaints are handled by Environment & Communities. 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.
- As it has been five years since the CHP was introduced, a review of complaints will take place in 2018 which will continue to drive improvement in practice and complaints performance. It will specifically consider the level of complaints received and response times for complaints.

2. Recommendations

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

- Note the content of this report and that a review of the complaints process will be lead by the Chief Executive's Service during 2018.

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. In April 2017, a new complaints handling procedure for Social Work complaints was brought into effect. It brings social work complaints largely in line with the complaints handling arrangements in place across the wider public sector. However the main difference relates to timescales, the extension for frontline complaints for Social Work complaints is 15 days, whereas for the model CHP it is only 10 days. Therefore, the complaints handling performance information detailed within this report does not include social work complaints which are covered separately 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 where a tenant has been waiting in for an appointment and the workmen failed to turn up. When this is reported the service would apologise and arrange a new suitable appointment.

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.

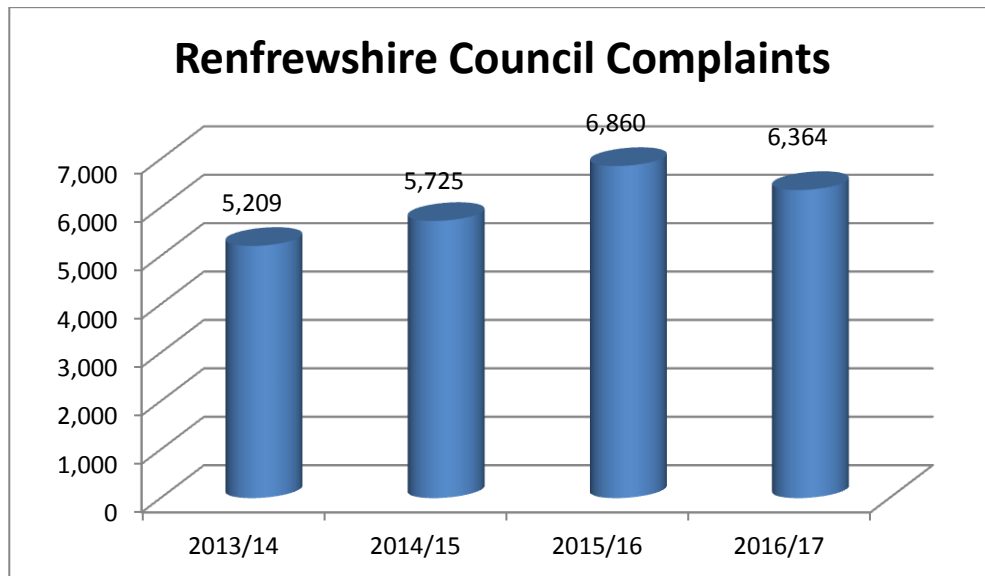
An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position. **The Council has 20 days to respond to these complaints.**

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. During 2017, a correspondence review and internal audit review were carried out, the learning from these will be implemented this year and involve a refresh of current complaints training and current service working arrangements to ensure a consistent approach to complaints across the council. A review of complaints will therefore take place in 2018 to continue to drive improvement in practice and complaints performance.

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 2016/17 against these key SPSO performance indicators.
- 4.2. Renfrewshire Council has experienced a decline in the number of complaints received this year, from 6,860 to 6,364.



- 4.3. Officers within the organisation are active in national benchmarking groups and review internal complaints handling performance levels against comparator organisations.
- 4.4. The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the local population is also small, with 6.75 complaints received per 1000 population; this has decreased since 2015/16 from 7 per 1000 population.
- 4.5. Complaints handling performance remains strong in Renfrewshire Council. 77% of frontline complaints and 93% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales.
- 4.6. In addition, the average time to respond to a frontline complaint was 5.2 days, which is higher than the 2015/16 figure where it was 3.9 days. The average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 13.2 days, which is within the SPSO target of 20 days.
- 4.7. In January 2018, the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board considered a report relating to the SPSO annual report for 2016/17. 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 49 complaints relative to Renfrewshire Council (out of a total of 5586 received) compared with 52 in 2015/16 and 62 in 2014/15. Of the 49 complaints determined by the SPSO during 2016/17, five were investigated, three were fully upheld, one was partly upheld and one was not upheld. 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 Work 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, Environment & Communities responded to 82% of complaints received, in relation to service areas such as:

- Refuse bin collections;
- Special uplift services;
- 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 2016/17	Proportion of Frontline Complaints received	Proportion of Investigation Complaints received
Chief Executives	0.1%	-	0.1%
Children's Services	0.1%	0.1%	-
Development & Housing	5.6%	5.8%	5.4%
Environment & Communities	82.1%	84.2%	9.4%
Finance & Resources	12.1%	9.9%	85.1%

5.3. Environment & Communities delivers the highest volume of frontline 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 Environment & Communities 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.

5.4. Finance and Resources respond to 85% of all Investigation complaints. This is due to the fact that the complaints this service receive are more complex in nature, such as Benefits and Legal & Licensing complaints.

6. Using complaints handling data to improve service delivery

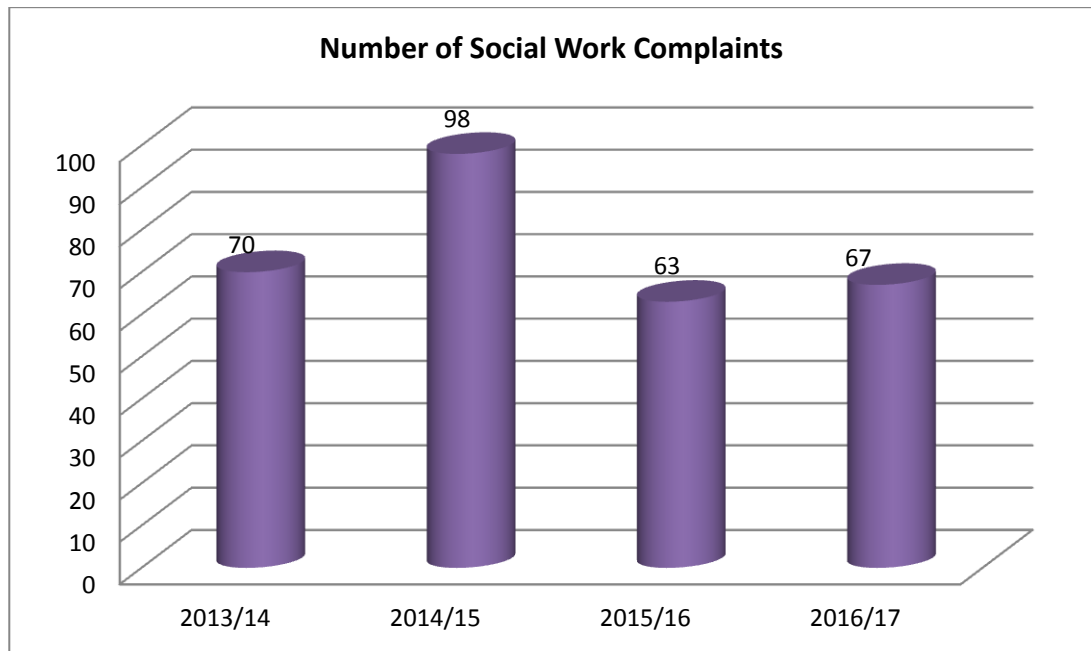
- 6.1. In response to feedback from complaints relating to the special uplift service, work is being undertaken to introduce a new system for Special Uplifts which will enhance existing processes and aim to improve response times and customer satisfaction.
- 6.2. The Charging and Payments Team within Finance and Resources recognised a trend from complaints regarding the delay in care charges contributions being calculated for people being admitted to care establishments. Financial assessments are required to be carried out when a resident is admitted to a care home and this process involves having to gather financial information for the resident in order to calculate their contributions towards the service of care they receive. To offset these delays, additional resource has been placed into this process in order to keep track of outstanding assessments and outstanding information to be chased up ensuring there are no unnecessary delays in notifying the client of contributions to be paid.
- 6.3. The Charging and Payments Team also identified trend in complaints regarding delays in processing contribution reassessments. Where a resident of a care home has savings above £26,500, they are classed as a Self-Funder. However, when their savings fall below this level, a reassessment should be carried out in order to recalculate their client contributions and also the contributions due by the Council. Due to the high volume and complexity of these complaints, further resource and greater management tools have been introduced to track when these changes may occur and report on the time taken to process the changes to eliminate the delays and reduce complaints.

7. Continuous improvement of the complaints handling process

- 7.1. In September 2016, the Strategic Planning and Policy section undertook an audit of complaints correspondence to ensure employees were skilled and equipped to differentiate between enquiries and complaints and follow the CHP effectively. This audit identified a number of valuable findings and lessons to be learned, which will be addressed in a planned refresh and relaunch of the CHP to all staff.
- 7.2. To take these lessons forward, a cross service working group will be 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 related to Social Work services are handled through a separate but complementary process to the Council's complaints handling procedure. Social Work endeavours to acknowledge complaints within 3 working days, 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. Anyone who is still unhappy with the complaint can appeal to the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) or the Chief Executive if the CSWO 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 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The SPSO's remit is limited in scope to looking at maladministration.
- 8.2. In March 2016, the Scottish Parliament approved the Public Service Reform (Social Work Complaints Procedure) (Scotland) Order 2016, which saw the removal of provisions for Social Work complaints in Scotland Act 1968 referred to in 8.1. In essence, SPSO produced a model Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP), bringing their functions for social work into closer alignment with those both of health and local authority complaints handling. It also saw the amendment of the Scottish Public Services Act 2002, extending the remit of the SPSO to enable them to consider complaints relating to the professional judgement in social work staff as opposed to their previous obligation that solely considered maladministration. This in effect removes completely the role of CRC's from the social work complaints procedure. New procedures have been developed in line with the handling of complaints for other public sector services and were fully implemented in Renfrewshire from 1 April 2017. All complaints received prior to 1 April 2017 will follow the historical social work complaints handling process, including the ones reported in this section.
- 8.3. 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
- 8.4. All 2016/17 Social Work complaints were handled under the previous system. The graph below shows the number of complaints received by social work in the last four years. The number of complaints received in 2016/17 increased slightly from last year, from 63 to 67. The 2016/17 figure is lower than the average number of complaints (75) over the past four years.



- 8.5. In order to align to the Council complaints handling process all complaints were measured against the 20 day timescale, rather than the discretionary 28 day limit prescribed in legislation. Social Work services received a total of 67 complaints in 2016/17, of these 54 complaints (81%) were processed on time. The 67 complaints across the social work services can be broken down between services provided by Children's Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Social work's Children's Services received 33 complaints and processed 29 on time (88%). The HSCP received 34 complaints and 25 (74%) were completed on time.
- 8.6. The Complaints Review Committee (CRC) process for handling the final internal stage of Social Work complaints, as outlined in 8.1, consists 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 Work staff. They then consider the decision made by the service and can overrule the decisions made by Social Work. In 2016/17, a total of 2 complaints were investigated by the CRC. One complaint related to child care and the other to adult services. In both cases the CRC did not overturn the original decision made by the service. However it was agreed that for one of the complaints (relating to adult services) one part of four issues scrutinised by the CRC was upheld and this related to miscommunication with clients.

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:
 - *Our Renfrewshire is thriving - none*
 - *Our Renfrewshire is well - none*
 - *Our Renfrewshire is fair - none*
 - *Our Renfrewshire is safe - none*
 - *Reshaping our place, our economy and our future - none*
 - *Building strong, safe and resilient communities - none*
 - *Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all - none*
 - *Creating a sustainable Renfrewshire for all to enjoy - none*
 - *Working together to improve outcomes - none*
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**

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Appendix 1

Renfrewshire Council Annual Complaints Report SPSO Indicators 2016/17





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










Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		Value	Value	Value
Total number of complaints received	↓	5,725	6,860	6,364
Total number of complaints received per 1000 population	↓	7.25	7	6.75

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

Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints	↓	97.2%	96.62%	97.16%
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	↓	5,441	5,077	6,184
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	↑	198	178	179
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	▬	5	5	1

Number of complaints closed at stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints		3.5%	3.4%	2.84%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation as a percentage of all complaints		0.1%	0.1%	0.02%

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	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1		74.3%	85.46%	91.24%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1		17.5%	8.99%	4.95%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage1		8.3%	5.55%	3.82%
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		36.9%	24.84%	35.91%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		51.5%	61.08%	54.14%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		11.6%	14.07%	9.94%
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints at stage 2		2.17%	0.93%	0.52%
Number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		6.82%	1.05%	0%
Number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		0%	0.65%	0%

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

Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		Value	Value	Value
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1	↑	5.7	3.9	5.2
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2	↑	13.2	12.6	13.28
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation	↑	10.8	1.9	18

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	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		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	↑	73.83%	81.5%	76.71%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints	↑	89.37%	93.85%	92.82%
Number of escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints	↓	0.5%	1.98%	0.55%

Priority 06 – The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working days timeline has been authorised

Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at stage 1	▬	1.23%	0.13%	0.06%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2	↓	0%	1.18%	0.55%