

To: Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Board

On: 18 March 2019

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Annual Complaints Report 2017/18

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 2017/18 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:
- 6,098 complaints were received in 2017/18, which is a reduction from 6,364 in 2016/17.
 - The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the local population is also small, with 6.5 complaints received per 1000 population; this has decreased since 2016/17 from 6.75 per 1000 population.

- 95% (4,826) of complaints were handled at the frontline stage demonstrating that the Council is highly responsive to initial reports of dissatisfaction from customers.
- Overall, 75.8% of frontline complaints were closed within target timescales. The average time taken to respond to frontline complaints received was 5.3 days, this is a slight increase from 2016/17 where it was 5.2 days and is slightly above the SPSO target of 5 days.
- Overall 94.8% of investigation complaints were completed within target timescales. The average time taken to respond to an investigation complaint received was 12.5 days, which is lower than in 2016/17 when it was 13.2 days and is well within the target set by the SPSO of 20 working days.
- 44% of complaints received at the investigation stage were upheld, compared to 36% in 2016/17.
- Only a very small number of complaints received are escalated to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman for investigation. In 2017/18, 48 complaints were received by the SPSO in relation to Renfrewshire, out of a total of 5,029 nationally. Of these 48, four were investigated, and of these three were partially upheld and one was 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 & Infrastructure. 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 took place during spring/summer 2018 which will continue to drive improvement in practice and complaints performance. The recommendations from the review are currently being implemented.

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 (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

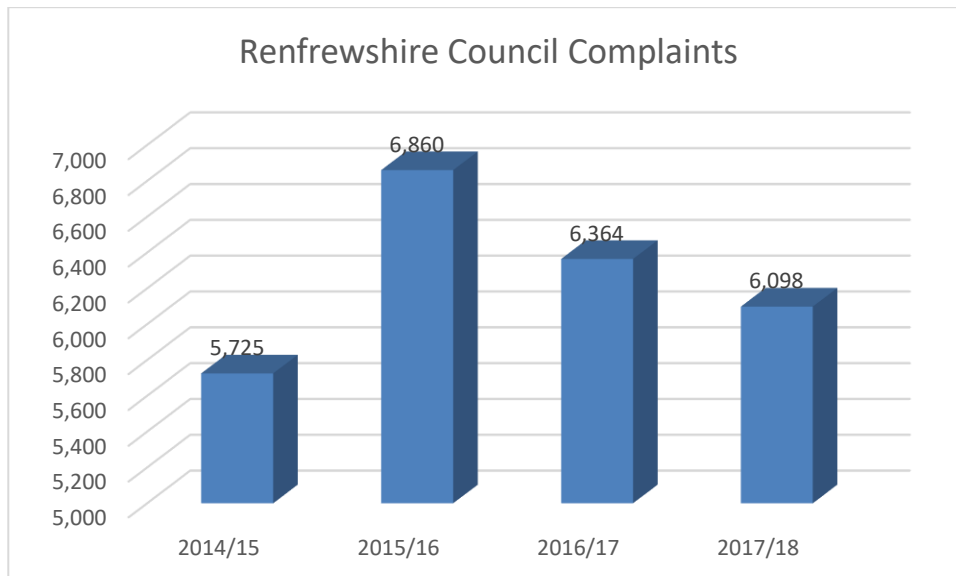
Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Complaints handled at the Investigation stage of the complaints handling procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination before the Council can state its position. 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.

4. Overall Council-wide 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 2017/18 against these key SPSO performance indicators.
- 4.2. Renfrewshire Council has experienced a decline in the number of complaints received this year, from 6,364 to 6,098. The number of complaints received in relation to the size of the local population is also small, with 6.5 complaints received per 1,000 population; this has decreased slightly since 2016/17 from 6.75 per 1,000 population.



4.3. Complaints handling performance remains strong in Renfrewshire Council. 76% of frontline complaints and 95% of investigation complaints received were completed within target timescales. The average time to respond to a frontline complaint was 5.3 days, which is slightly higher than the 2016/17 figure where it was 5.2 days. The average time to respond to an investigation complaint was 12.5 days, which is within the SPSO target of 20 days.

4.4. 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 48 complaints relative to Renfrewshire Council (out of a total of 5,029 received) compared with 49 in 2016/17 and 52 in 2015/16. Of the 48 complaints determined by the SPSO during 2017/18, four were investigated, three were 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. **Service-level 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 & Infrastructure responded to 77% 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 and number of complaints received in 2017/18	Proportion and number of Frontline Complaints received	Proportion and number of Investigation Complaints received
Chief Executives	0.01%	-	1%
Children's Services	1%	1%	-
Communities, Housing & Planning	10%	10%	6%
Environment & Infrastructure	77%	79%	11%
Finance & Resources	12%	10%	82%

- 5.3. Environment & Infrastructure delivers the highest volume of frontline council services, which includes: refuse collection, roads maintenance, streetscene and land services, parks and cemeteries, street lighting and housing repairs. It is to be expected therefore that Environment & Infrastructure 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 82% of all Investigation complaints. This is due to the fact that the complaints this service receive are more complex in nature, such as complaints regarding Benefits and Legal & Licensing complaints.
- 5.5 The number of complaints for Children's Services, listed in table 2, does not include those provided by social work services (these are noted in section eight of this paper) or complaints received by education establishments relating to allegations of bullying. Renfrewshire Council's bullying policy makes it clear that reports of alleged bullying will be treated as bullying incidents, not complaints, and therefore, the school will aim to complete an investigation and implement any remedial action within 3 working days. The bullying policy has

differing timescales than our complaints policy and schools are required to communicate the outcome to affected children, young people and their parents. If a parent or other affected person is dissatisfied with the way the school or Council has *handled* the bullying incident, this will be considered under the Council's complaints handling procedure and be included in the service's data.

6. Using complaints handling data to improve service delivery

- 6.1. As part of the council's commitment to using issues raised to improve service delivery where possible, below provides some examples of how we are using feedback from the CHP to improve services.
- 6.2. In response to feedback from complaints relating to information on the council website regarding care provider discounts for council tax and unoccupied and unfurnished exemptions for council tax, the Charging and Payments Team updated wording on the web pages to clarify the levels of reduction available for different circumstances and the exemption periods.
- 6.3. The Charging and Payments Team within Finance and Resources recognised a trend from complaints regarding the appeals process for Housing Benefit revisions. Training for staff has been developed in response to these complaints to ensure staff have a clearer understanding of the appeal process and are able to advise customers on their appeal rights.
- 6.4. Within Communities, Housing and Planning Services, a detailed analysis of quarter one's complaints was carried out, with each complaint audited to understand the root cause and monitor the complainant's journey. The Director of Communities, Housing and Planning and the Head of Planning and Housing held a meeting with senior managers to discuss the findings and discuss the potential ways to reduce complaints. A follow-up audit will be carried out in 2019/20 to map across any common themes and identify any possible service improvements.

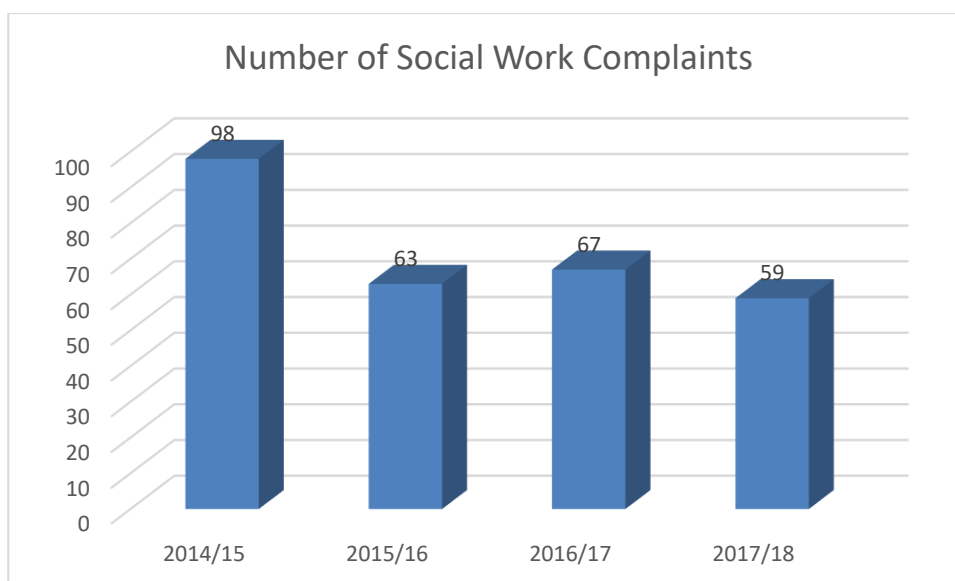
7. Continuous improvement of the complaints handling process

- 7.1. During 2018, the Strategic Planning and Policy section undertook a council-wide review of the complaints handling procedure to ensure the policy was still fit for purpose and that there was a consistent approach to complaints handling across all council services.
- 7.2. A Complaints Review and Development Group (CRDG) was established comprising of officers from across council services to ensure the review considered specific service requirements as well as the overarching complaints handling policy.

- 7.3. The recommendations of the review and the refreshed complaints handling procedure will be reported to the Finance, Resources and Customer Services Policy Board on 27 March for approval.

8. Social Work Complaints

- 8.1. From 1 April 2017, the process for handling Social Work complaints was brought into line with the council-wide complaints process, with the two-stage process of frontline and investigation complaints being introduced. There is still a minor difference between the 2 procedures, in terms of the ability under the social work procedure for frontline resolution complaints to be extended by up to 10 working days in agreement with the customer.
- 8.2. The new social work CHP 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.
- 8.3. All 2017/18 Social Work complaints were handled under the new system. The graph below shows the number of complaints received by social work in the last four years.



- 8.4. Social Work services received a total of 59 complaints in 2017/18, of these 38 complaints (64%) were processed on time. The 59 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 22 complaints and processed 13 on time (59%) whilst the HSCP received 37 complaints and 25 (68%) were completed on time.
- 8.5. The complaints received in relation to Children's Services Social Work covered the following four issues; contact plans between children and their parents; the

standard of care provided for individual children; the standard of service in terms of policies and procedures; and the attitude of staff. Most of the complaints received relate to a parent disagreeing with the professional assessment of the social worker involved with their family. These assessments are provided as recommendations to children's hearings or interagency meetings and are therefore subject to scrutiny.

- 8.6. The HSCP are currently reviewing the paperwork used for recording Adult Services complaints and going forward will include an action plan section for each complaint. This will enable more robust learning from complaints to be undertaken for the service.

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	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		Value	Value	Value
Total number of complaints received	↓	6,860	6,364	6,098
Total number of complaints received per 1000 population	↓	7	6.75	6.5


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

Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	↓	5,077	6,184	4,826
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints	↓	96.62%	97.16%	95.45%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	↓	178	179	116




Number of complaints closed at stage 2 as a percentage of all complaints		3.4%	2.84%	4.55%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation		5	1	1
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation as a percentage of all complaints		0.1%	0.02%	0.05%

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	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1		85.46%	91.24%	82.47%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 1		8.99%	4.95%	9.28%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage1		5.55%	3.82%	8.28%
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		24.84%	35.91%	43.8%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		61.08%	54.14%	45.1%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		14.07%	9.94%	11.11%
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints at stage 2		0.93%	0.52%	0.58%
Number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		1.05%	0%	0%

Number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		0.65%	0%	0%
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Priority 04. The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

Short Name	Long Term Trend Arrow	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		Value	Value	Value
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 1		3.9	5.2	5.33
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2		12.6	13.28	12.47
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation		1.9	18	5

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	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		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		81.5%	81.5%	75.83%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints		93.85%	93.85%	94.77%
Number of escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as a percentage of total number of stage 2 complaints		1.98%	1.98%	0.58%

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	Long Term Trend Arrow	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
		Value	Value	Value
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints at stage 1		0.13%	0.13%	0%
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where extension was authorised, as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage 2		1.18%	1.18%	2.53%