

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET16 June 2016Report by Deputy Chief Executive2015/16 End Year Complaints Reporting**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on East Renfrewshire Council's complaints handling performance for 2015/16.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet scrutinizes and comments on the Council's performance on complaints handling and learning from complaints during 2015/16.

BACKGROUND

3. East Renfrewshire Council is committed to being a modern, efficient organisation, responsive to the needs and views of our residents, customers and visitors to the area. An important part of our commitment is ensuring we have in place a simple, quick and effective method of resolving matters when things go wrong and also learning from any problems identified to improve the level and quality of services we provide. We ensure that clear and transparent information is available on our complaints performance - and the improvement actions that are undertaken.

4. In April 2013, in line with statutory guidance issued by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), we revised our complaints handling procedure moving to a two stage process. All Scottish councils are required to assess and monitor their complaints handling performance against a number of high level performance indicators. A detailed report on our performance against these indicators for 2015/16, including a comparison with 2014/15, is attached as Annex 1.

5. The East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) follow separate statutory complaints procedures. HSCP performance on complaints is not included in this report.

SUMMARY OF COUNCIL COMPLAINTS 2015/16

6. We received 1,677 complaints in 2015/16 compared to 1,579 in 2014/15 (an increase of 98 complaints or 6%)¹. National data is not yet available for 2015/16 but trend data for previous years shows an increasing volume of complaints being received each year by Scottish councils². Increasing numbers of complaints may reflect higher levels of dissatisfaction but may also demonstrate that complaints procedures are more accessible,

¹ Note - 2014/15 data includes complaints relating to culture and leisure services which have now been transferred to the East Renfrewshire Culture and Leisure Trust.

² Total complaints to Scottish councils rose by 14% between 2013/14 and 2014/15, SPSO data

there are better levels of recording, and local residents are more empowered to make a complaint.

7. Most complaints are received by the Environment Department. This is to be expected given the highly frontline and universal nature of the wide range of services provided (e.g. cleansing and refuse collection).

8. The vast majority of complaints received by the council (96%) were dealt with at first point of contact. The high level of Frontline Resolution (Stage 1) reflects the lower level of seriousness of most complaints and indicates that most customers were satisfied with the way their complaint was dealt with at first point of contact, and did not result in any further investigation. The proportion of complaints resolved at stage one increased slightly this year compared with 2014/15.

9. Around a third of all complaints closed by the Council in 2015/16 (34%) were not upheld. The Council upheld 57% of complaints and partially upheld 9%. Frontline (Stage 1) complaints are more likely to be upheld than Investigation (Stage 2) complaints.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PERFORMANCE

10. The Council's performance is steadily improving in relation to complaints handling in terms of efficiency, timescales for dealing with complaints, and customer satisfaction with the complaints procedure.

11. The vast majority of complaints are responded to within timescales and our performance on this indicator has also been improving since 2014/15. 85% of Frontline (Stage 1) complaints are closed within target timescales and 89% of Investigation Complaints (Stage 2) including after escalation, are closed within target timescales.

12. In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, complaints handlers may agree an extension to the timescale with the customer. In 2015/16 there was only limited use of timescale extensions for complaints, with only 16 authorisations. In 2015/16, 12 extensions were authorised at Frontline (Stage 1), and 4 at Investigation (Stage 2).

13. We actively seek feedback from customers on the operation of our complaints handling processes through an online survey conducted each quarter. While the survey is a positive method for gathering customer views, it should be noted that the response rate represents just 10% of all complaints made (in 2015/16 there were 179 responses compared with a total of 1,677 complaints). As such, the results should be treated with some caution.

14. Over the past year, there has been an improvement across all satisfaction indicators from survey respondents in relation to complaints handling. The highest levels of respondents' satisfaction were recorded about "how easy it was to make a complaint", "how polite staff were" and "how well staff understood your complaint". Although the picture was improving, there was lower satisfaction with "being kept up to date with the progress of your complaint" and "being given a clear explanation of the reason for the Council's decision". More than a third of respondents were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled generally. The results indicate that while the process for making a complaint is considered to be straightforward, we need to continue to focus on how effectively we communicate with customers throughout the complaints process.

NATURE OF COMPLAINTS

15. Complaints received by the Council are recorded under one of eight complaint categories. Nearly half of all complaints closed in 2015/16 related to 'Standard/Quality of service'. Other categories of complaint that received comparatively high proportions of complaints in 2015/16 were 'Delays/timescales', 'Policy' and 'Attitude of staff'. There was a notable reduction in the number of complaints relating to 'Communication'.

IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS

16. We are committed to learning from the complaints we received. At the earliest opportunity after the closure of a complaint, the complaint handler is responsible for ensuring that the customer and staff of the relevant department understand the findings of the investigation and any recommendations made. Where we have identified the need for service improvement, a defined improvement action will be authorised by managers and a designated officer will be responsible for ensuring the action is taken.

17. In 2015/16, there were a range of improvement actions which have directly resulted from complaints monitoring (full listing at Annex 1). These actions included:

- We increased pre-five places in Newton Mearns in response to concerns raised by residents.
- We reviewed Customer First calls procedures and adoption of the Customer Care procedures.
- We updated our website to ensure it provides easy access for customers to contact us.
- A Workforce Planning Officer has been appointed to improve performance on housing repairs.
- Training was provided to improve our council tax collection procedures.
- We agreed to extend current Breakfast club provision in schools to the end of the school session.
- In the Environment Department a new approach for re-cycling and cleansing complaints is being piloted this year
- Training in complaints handling has been provided to staff in different departments to improve understanding of complaint procedures and ensure best practice.

18. We are active participants in the national Complaints Handlers' Network, aiming to continually improve our approach through sharing and benchmarking best practice with other councils. We also operate a local Complaints Handlers' Group, which involves officers responsible for complaints reporting across Council departments, to review local practice. A 2015/16 internal audit of the Corporate and Community Services Department set out some procedural improvement actions in relation to complaints (e.g. all supporting documentation should be included in the complaints reporting system (Lagan)). These actions were promoted through the local Complaints Handlers' Group and training provided by Customer First.

CONCLUSION

19. The Council's performance in relation to complaints is improving steadily. We have an efficient and effective complaints handling procedure in place which is now fully embedded in day-to-day practice. Although the number of complaints received rose in

2015/16, we are responding to complaints more quickly and well within the national target timescales.

20. We are continually seeking to improve our processes and the quality of service provision and recognise that complaints are a key source of customer feedback. We will continue to develop and use complaints data to highlight key themes and issues, learn from the complaints we receive, and further improve services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

21. It is recommended that the Cabinet scrutinizes and comments on the Council's performance on complaints handling and learning from complaints during 2015/16.

REPORT AUTHORS

Steven Reid, Corporate Policy Officer, steven.reid@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk
Matthew Sweeney, Policy and Community Planning Assistant, matthew.sweeney@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk


Cabinet contact: Councillor Jim Fletcher, Leader of the Council,
Tel: 0141 639 0265 (Home), 0141 577 3112 (Office)

End Year Complaints Report 2015/16⁴

Complaints Received per 1000 of the Population.				
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge ³	Notes
Number complaints received per 1,000 population.	17.3	18.2	+0.9	There were 1,677 complaints received in 2015/16, an increase of 98 from 2014/15. We also report specifically on our Housing complaints. 243 of the 1,677 complaints related to housing.

Complaints Closed at Stage one and Stage two			
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number complaints closed at stage one as % of all complaints	95% (1,521)	96% (1,601)	+3%
Number complaints closed at stage two as % of all complaints	3% (48)	2% (31)	-1%
Number complaints closed at stage two after escalation as % of all complaints	2% (38)	2% (35)	N.C.

Complaints Upheld/ Partially Upheld/ Not Upheld			
Not upheld	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number complaints not upheld at stage one as % of complaints closed at stage one	36% (553)	33% (523)	-3%
Number complaints not upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	60% (29)	52% (16)	-8%
Number escalated complaints not upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	58% (22)	63% (22)	+5%
Partially Upheld	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage one as % of complaints closed at stage one	11% (169)	9% (144)	-2%
Number complaints partially upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	21% (10)	16% (5)	-5%
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	26% (10)	17% (6)	-9%
Upheld	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one	53% (799)	58% (931)	+5%
Number complaints upheld at stage two as % of complaints closed at stage two	19% (9)	32% (10)	+13%
Number escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of escalated complaints closed at stage two	16% (6)	20% (7)	+4%

The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.					
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge	SPSO Target	Status
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one (frontline).	4.1	3.6	-0.5	5	

³ Data change from 2014/15 to 2015/16.

⁴ Data notes: Definitions: Stage 1 - complaints closed at stage 1 Frontline Resolution; Stage 2 (direct) - complaints that bypassed stage 1 and went directly to stage 2 Investigation (e.g. complex complaints); Escalated - complaints which were dealt with at stage 1 and subsequently escalated to stage 2 (e.g. because the customer remained dissatisfied); Investigation - stage 2 and escalated complaints combined.

The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.					
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge	SPSO Target	Status
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two (investigation).	15.7	14.1	-1.6	20	✓
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (investigation).	14.5	14.6	+0.1	20	✓
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at investigation (stage 2 and escalation combined)	15.2	13.6	-1.6	20	✓

Complaints at each stage closed within set timescales.			
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of stage one complaints	79% (1,197)	84.6% (1,364)	+5.6%
Number complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of stage two complaints	83% (40)	83.9% (29)	+0.9%
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated stage two complaints	87% (33)	94.3% (33)	+7.3%
Number investigation complaints closed within 20 working days as % of investigation complaints (stage 2 and esc combined)	85% (73)	89.3% (62)	+4.3%

Where extensions to the 5 or 20 working day timeline were authorised.			
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
% of complaints at stage one where extension was authorised	0.8% (12)	0.7% (12)	-0.1 %
% of complaints at stage two where an extension was authorised.	0%	9.7% (3)	+9.7%
% of escalated complaints where extension was authorised.	0%	2.9% (1)	+2.9%

Customer Satisfaction Measures

To assess satisfaction with the complaints service we survey complainants throughout the year. Just over 30% responded to our online survey. Of this around 40% were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled. Complainants were most satisfied with how easy it was to make a complaint and how polite staff were. Less were satisfied on being given a clear explanation of the reasons for our decision and being kept up to date, as in 14/15. This data is used to improve the procedure for our customers.

High Level Survey results	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
% responding to complaints satisfaction survey.	28.5%	31.8%	+3.3%
% satisfied with way complaint was handled.	31.3%	38.2%	+7.1%
% satisfied with outcome of complaint.	25%	34.2%	+9.2%
% satisfied with how well staff understood your complaint.	29%	41.4%	+12.4%
% satisfied with how easy it was to make a complaint.	58.2%	75%	+16.8%
% satisfied with how polite staff were.	43.6%	51.3%	+7.7%
% satisfied with being given a clear explanation of the reasons for the Council's decision.	18.8%	29.8%	+11%
% satisfied with being kept up to date with the progress of your complaint.	23.4%	24.2%	+0.8%
% satisfied with time taken to deal with complaint from start to finish.	32.8%	35.1%	+2.3%

Category of complaint

Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number of complaints received under the category 'Attitude of staff'	168	162	-6
Number of complaints received under the category 'Bias/ discrimination'	19	14	-5
Number of complaints received under the category 'Communication'	102	63	-39
Number of complaints received under the category ' Delays/ timescales'	124	167	+43
Number of complaints received under the category 'Finance and charging'	31	20	-11
Number of complaints received under the category 'Other'	251	253	+2
Number of complaints received under the category 'Policy'	168	167	-1
Number of complaints received under the category 'Standard/ Quality of service'	744	821	+77

Outcome of complaint			
Description	2014/15	2015/16	Chge
Number of complaints with outcome 'Action not recorded'	0	3	+3
Number of complaints with outcome 'Information provided'	1,134	1,191	+57
Number of complaints with outcome 'Other'	122	118	-4
Number of complaints with outcome 'Re-imburement'	17	12	-5
Number of complaints with outcome 'Request action/Service'	287	291	+4
Number of complaints with outcome 'Reviewed procedures'	27	22	-5
Number of complaints with outcome 'Staff training'	20	30	+10

Improvement Actions 2015/6
<p>Complaints data is closely monitored to ensure we learn from complaints and make service improvements. In 2015/16, service improvement actions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing pre-five places in Newton Mearns; • Reviewing Customer First calls and the Customer Care procedure; • Targeted training for frontline staff; • Work underway on an improved online payment system for Council bills and payments to services; • Work to improve the accessibility for customers to contact the Council through our website. This includes ongoing work to improve how customers contact the council, looking in particular at having a 'general enquiries / can't find what you are looking for' facility on the website; • Appointing a new Housing Workforce Planning Officer to deal with delays and improve communication around housing repairs; • Environment Department have carried out a review of all complaint handlers within service areas and increased the number of staff who can handle complaints, improving the timeliness and accuracy of complaint handling. • Cleansing and Recycling have scoped out a project to aim to reduce the number of complaints received by having a nominated Officer handle all the cleansing and recycling enquiries/complaints. • Staff development for all Head teachers and Education central staff was provided by SPSO to share good practice, improve understanding of complaint procedures and provide useful strategies for responding and resolving complaints. • Education administrative staff completed a complaint handling refresher course to ensure prompt updates to progress and actions are made on the Lagan system. • The Education department agreed to extend current Breakfast club provision in schools to the end of the school session. • Our website was updated with clearer and more detailed information on taxi licenses. • Monitoring of the new Sheriff Officer contract to ensure levels of service are maintained. • Reduction in noise levels during the Electric Glen festival.

- Training in council tax collection procedures.