

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 31 October 2017

Complaints Management

Item number	7.1
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	
Council commitment:	Delivering a Council that works for all

Executive Summary

A strategic complaints function has been established as part of the Council's Information Governance Unit to provide a more coherent and strategic approach to the management of complaints throughout the Council.

The Unit has led a Council-wide review of complaint handling and the development of a Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan. This report sets out the background and approach to this process, as well as the key findings and improvement actions required to improve complaints management across the organisation.

Complaints Management

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to note:
 - 1.1.1 the development of a Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan to strengthen the management of complaints across the Council; and
 - 1.1.2 that an up-date report will be presented to Committee in Spring 2018.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the external regulator for complaints management across the public sector. In 2012, it published a local authority model complaints handling procedure to establish a standard approach to handling complaints. The Council used the model procedure as the basis of its own complaints procedure which was launched in 2013.
- 2.2 The Council's complaints procedure is based on a service-led de-centralised approach to handling complaints. The Corporate Complaints Management Group, consisting of complaint practitioners from service areas, provides a degree of corporate visibility which is reinforced through regular performance reporting.
- 2.3 The Council's Transformation Programme recognised the need for a more coherent and strategic approach to complaints management. As part of the establishment of the Strategy and Insight Division, a strategic complaint function was created under the Information Governance Unit in 2016.
- 2.4 This arrangement acknowledged the existing role of the Information Governance Unit in managing complaints escalated to the SPSO, and the need for better oversight of complex complaints situations which can often be conflated with freedom of information processes. The Unit now provides a single point of reference for advice and support in these areas.
- 2.5 A Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan has been developed following a Council-wide review and consultation process. While the Plan is owned by the Information Governance Unit and Corporate Complaints Management Group, all Council services are responsible for the plan's implementation.
- 2.6 The Improvement Plan is based on SPSO's Complaints Improvement Framework which has been established to help organisations assess and demonstrate the effectiveness of their overall complaints handling arrangements through self-assessment criteria.

- 2.7 The Improvement Plan formed part of the evidence provided to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to demonstrate compliance with regulator recommendations concerning the Council's management of certain outdoor advertising contracts. This formed part of a Monitoring Officer Report which was reported to this Committee on 1 August 2017.
- 2.8 As part of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's procedures, public authorities are asked to evidence that regulator recommendations have been met. Since 2014, all decisions and recommendations are tracked through the Information Governance Unit's case management system, and provide a complete and comprehensive audit trail.
- 2.9 The remainder of this report provides further detail on the approach, key findings and future actions to improve complaints handling across the organisation.

3. Main report

Key findings

- 3.1 The Complaints Management Review identified several areas of good practice; however, it noted a number of issues and areas for improvement which are set out below:
 - 3.1.1 Several systems are used to capture complaints information leading to a variety of classifications within the process. These inconsistencies in recording practices have reduced the Council's ability to conduct meaningful root-cause analysis across services. This also means that the same complaint can be recorded more than once.
 - 3.1.2 Complaint response timescales are not always met within the indicators set by the SPSO. The figures in Appendix 1 are based on complaints statistics which have been produced by the Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network. Within this, local authorities have been grouped with others that have a similar dispersion of population, so meaningful comparisons can be drawn. The Network refers to these as 'family groups'. The Council's 'family group' includes Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow City Councils.
 - 3.1.3 UK-wide comparisons are not possible. English local authorities do not have a standardised complaints procedure, neither do they have a standardised set of key performance indicators. Therefore, it is only possible to benchmark within Scotland, where all local authorities follow the same complaints handling procedure and measure performance against the same indicators as set by the SPSO.
 - 3.1.4 Investigation responses issued under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure vary in terms of consistency and assurance from senior management.

- 3.1.5 There is no coherent process for dealing with complex complaint situations and any required escalation.
- 3.1.6 Corporate procedures and training have not been reviewed since 2013, with uncertainty around roles and responsibilities.
- 3.1.7 Lack of a clear process for complaints received by Elected Members.

Improvement actions

- 3.2 In response to the Review's findings, several improvement actions have been identified. These will be progressed through continued engagement with service areas, Elected Members, the Regulator and Citizens, and include:
 - 3.2.1 The development of a Corporate Complaints Policy setting out agreed standards for recording, managing and reporting complaints, including the Council's commitment to using complaints as a learning tool to improve service delivery. The policy will define roles and responsibilities to ensure that all services and employees clearly understand their responsibilities in this area.
 - 3.2.2 A comprehensive review of the Council's current Complaints Procedure to support policy and ensure greater consistency, in line with Scottish Public Service Ombudsman best practice and the standards being developed by the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network. Clarity around how to manage and highlight complex complaint situations which cross-over multiple service areas or disciplines will form a key part of the review and revised procedure.
 - 3.2.3 The development of mechanisms and criteria to measure customer satisfaction in relation to complaint handling.
 - 3.2.4 Streamlining, where possible, the systems currently used for recording complaints to reduce duplication and improve performance reporting.
 - 3.2.5 Defining agreed complaint categories, in line with national standards, to enable consistent recording and increase the Council's ability to analyse and learn from complaints.
 - 3.2.6 Developing a communications and outreach programme around complaints handling, including a review of information available on the ORB, and the development of web content where information around Council actions on complaints can be proactively published. This will be supported through revised training (e-learning and face to face) and the establishment of an internal complaint handlers network through which best practice and learning can be proactively shared across the Council.

- 3.2.7 The introduction of a quality assurance programme, specifically directed at Stage 2 complaints, to ensure opportunities to improve practice can be identified prior to any regulatory action being taken.
- 3.2.8 Improved performance reporting to senior management and Elected Members in line with the Council's performance framework.
- 3.2.9 Ensuring the complaint handling policy and procedure are aligned with Council customer strategies, and accepted customer behaviour through a review of the Managing Customer Contact in a Fair and Positive Way Policy.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 A complaints management framework that supports the efficient handling of complaints throughout the organisation through effective policy, procedure, and training, and aligns with SPSO best practice and standards.
- 4.2 A culture within the organisation that values complaints to improve services.
- 4.3 Meeting statutory indicators set by the SPSO, including timeous responses to any complaints raised.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 There are no financial aspects arising from this report. The focus of the Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan is to use existing resources in a more efficient and targeted way to drive Council-wide improvement and change.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 The Council must meet various indicators set by the SPSO and consider any recommendations made by them in relation to complaints escalated by members of the public. Failure to do so can lead to poor customer service for citizens, reputational damage for the Council, and potential service inefficiencies.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 There are no direct equalities issues arising from this report, but equality rights will be a central consideration as the Complaints Improvement Plan is progressed.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There are no sustainability issues arising from this report.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 There has been an extensive consultation and engagement exercise with Council services in developing the Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan, including an emphasis on customer experience and expectations.
- 9.2 There will continue to be extensive consultation with Elected Members, services, citizens and the SPSO as the Plan's actions are taken forward and implemented.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [City of Edinburgh Council Complaints Procedure](#)
- 10.2 [Monitoring Officer Report, Item 7.7 Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, 1 August 2017](#)
- 10.3 [City of Edinburgh Council Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan](#)

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

Contact: Laurence Rockey, Head of Strategy and Insight

E-mail: Laurence.rockey@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3493

11. Appendix

Edinburgh Complaints analysis provided by the Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network for 2016/17

Appendix: Edinburgh Complaints analysis provided by the Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network for 2016/17

Note: The Scottish Local Authorities Complaint Handlers Network has grouped local authorities together with others that have a similar dispersion of population, so meaningful comparisons can be drawn. These are known as 'family groups'. The Council's 'family group' includes Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow City Councils.

Total Complaints received for Edinburgh	19,741
Family Group Average	2,850
Complaints received per 1,000 population - Edinburgh	40.1
National average received per 1,000 population	14.29

Average time to close complaints

Stage 1 - Edinburgh	12.44 days
Stage 1 - Family Group Average	8.3 days
Stage 2 - Edinburgh	26.26 days
Stage 2 - Family Group Average	19.1 days

* Stage 1 SPSO target 5 working days

* Stage 2 SPSO target 20 working days

Performance against timescales

Stage 1 - Edinburgh	8,047/14,902	53.9 %
Stage 1 - Family Group Average	1,660/2,517	66%
Stage 2 - Edinburgh	1,213/2,015	60.2%
Stage 2 - Family Group Average	170/266	64%