
Report to Resources and Audit Committee

Date of Meeting: 20 June 2013

Subject: Annual Complaints Report 2012/13

Report by: Customer Services Manager

1.0 Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of:

- (i) progress in implementing the new Corporate Complaints system, in accordance with requirements set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and
- (ii) the volume and nature of customer complaints recorded in 2012/13, key performance information related to the handling of complaints and early observations on areas for further improvement.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that Committee:

- a) note the progress made in implementing the national model Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP),
- b) note, comment on and challenge the volume and nature of complaints recorded since the new system was introduced in September 2012,
- c) note the ongoing improvements required to ensure the complaints system is robust and effective going forwards, ensuring feedback is used to drive improvement, and
- d) consider the type of management information required to support the scrutiny and monitoring of customer complaints going forward.

3.0 Background

3.1. A new Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) was developed in early 2012 by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to help simplify, standardise and improve complaints handling across Scottish local government. All local authorities were required to implement the model CHP in line with SPSO guidance.

- 3.2. One of the key drivers for the new system was to reduce the significant resource and hence cost in dealing with complaints, as part of wider Public Sector Reform. The model CHP adopts best practice, with a stronger focus on resolving more complaints at source, learning more from customer feedback and using the feedback to improve service delivery. In practice, the Council's previous 3-stage approach has been replaced by a more streamlined 2-stage approach, with the aim of resolving most complaints at Stage 1 (within 5 days) and complaints only being passed to Stage 2 for further investigation, where necessary.
- 3.3. All local authorities needed to demonstrate to the SPSO that they had implemented (or had robust plans to implement) the model CHP by mid-September 2012.
- 3.4. Clackmannanshire Council was one of only a few councils to be scored as 'Fully Compliant' by September 2012.
- 3.5. Updated documentation was made available to customers and staff. Consultation on the new documentation was carried out with a number of key stakeholders, including Clackmannanshire Tenants & Residents Federation, the Joint Community Council Forum and a sample of the general public. Service Managers and Team Leaders were tasked with cascading details of the new 2-stage system to all staff. An improved IT solution was created to record and monitor complaints.

4.0 Progress to date

- 4.1. A total of 152 complaints were logged in the complaints database in 2012/13 (**Appendix 1**); 65 in the first 6 months (using the old system) and 87 from October to March using the new 2-stage system.
- 4.2. These are broken down further in Appendix 1 by service area, category of complaint, number dealt with at stage 1 and stage 2, percentage resolved within target timescale and number upheld/not upheld/partially upheld.
- 4.3. Key points of note from those recorded under the new 2-stage system:
 - 81 out of the 87 were resolved at Stage 1 (93%).
 - 74% of Stage 1 complaints were resolved within the target time of 5 days.
 - 6 complaints were passed to Stage 2 for investigation; 4 out of the 6 (67%) were responded to within the target time of 20 days.
 - Community & Regulatory Services (including Housing) accounted for 46 out of the 87 (ie 53%). This is perhaps not surprising for such a visible, front line service.
 - 44 out of the 87 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld (51%).
 - The main reason for complaints was due to the quality of service (59%).

5.0 Areas for development

5.1. Whilst the Council's approach has been rated as 'Fully Complaint' by SPSO, it is prudent to identify areas for further improvement:

- There is evidence that most services have communicated the new approach widely, have encouraged staff at the front line to take greater responsibility in resolving complaints for customers, and have been open in encouraging staff to record negative feedback to help them identify what needs improved.
- Significant training has been provided on the new complaints procedure, with an internal survey showing that 74% of those asked were aware of the new CHP. The survey also showed that 50% were aware of the timescales for responding to a complaint. Though there is clearly more work to do, given the relatively short period the system has been in operation, these results indicate impact, as well as providing a clear indication of where further communication and training is best targeted to reduce variation.
- There is still variation in the way the new system is being implemented across council services.
- Conversely, there is evidence that some services haven't fully communicated or trained all relevant staff in the new system. There is evidence of some complaints not being recorded on the database, and not being accepted as a justifiable complaint.
- Whilst our culture is moving towards one of accepting and indeed welcoming complaints as a method of improving service, there remains work to do in relation to changing perceptions - complaints should not be seen as a negative measure of performance against the service. Service managers therefore are being encouraged to lead staff by their example in being open and transparent in the way they receive and learn from negative feedback.
- As a result, conclusions should not be drawn simply on the number of complaints recorded here - some services may be actively encouraging their recording (and this should be welcomed), whereas there may be under-reporting in other areas.
- Given the large number of customer interactions processed on a daily basis (approximately 2,000 per day), the number of complaints recorded is still very small in comparison (~ 0.03% or 3 in 10,000).

6.0 Conclusions

6.1. Significant progress has been made in introducing the new model Complaints Handling Procedure and this has been formally recognised by the SPSO.

6.2. The Council's performance in recording and responding to complaints is being routinely monitored.

6.3. A number of improvements will be taken forward with service managers to ensure we adopt a positive approach to complaints handling, including improving our recording of positive comments and compliments.

7.0 Sustainability Implications

7.1. There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 Resource Implications

8.1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9.0 Exempt Reports

9.1. Is this report exempt? No

10.0 Declarations

The recommendations contained within this report support or implement our Corporate Priorities and Council Policies.

(1) **Our Priorities** (Please double click on the check box)

The area has a positive image and attracts people and businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our communities are more cohesive and inclusive	<input type="checkbox"/>
People are better skilled, trained and ready for learning and employment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our communities are safer	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vulnerable people and families are supported	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substance misuse and its effects are reduced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health is improving and health inequalities are reducing	<input type="checkbox"/>
The environment is protected and enhanced for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Council is effective, efficient and recognised for excellence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(2) **Council Policies** (Please detail)

11.0 Equalities Impact

11.1 Have you undertaken the required equalities impact assessment to ensure that no groups are adversely affected by the recommendations?

Yes No Not applicable

12.0 Legality

12.1 It has been confirmed that in adopting the recommendations contained in this report, the Council is acting within its legal powers. Yes

13.0 Appendices

13.1 Please list any appendices attached to this report. If there are no appendices, please state "none".

Appendix 1 - Annual Complaints Review 2012/13

14.0 Background Papers

14.1 Have you used other documents to compile your report? (All documents must be kept available by the author for public inspection for four years from the date of meeting at which the report is considered)

No

Author(s)

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Approved by

NAME	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
Stuart Crickmar	Head of Strategy & Customer Services	
Nikki Bridle	Director of Finance & Corporate Services	

APPENDIX 1 - ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REVIEW 2012/13

1st Apr 2012 to 30 Sep 2012:

Q1 and Q2 2013 (Old system)	S&CS	Support Serv.	Comm & Reg	Facilities	Education	Social Serv.	Members	Council
Total number of complaints - Q1	1	2	15	1	0	6	0	25
Total number of complaints - Q2	3	2	18	16	1	0	0	40
Total Q1 and Q2	4	4	33	17	1	6	0	65
By Category								
By Category	S&CS	Support Serv.	Comm & Reg	Facilities	Education	Social Serv.	Members	Council
Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Employee	0	2	4	5	0	0	0	11
Health & Safety	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	5
Member	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Policy Decision	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	11
Quality of Service	3	2	16	10	1	6	0	38
TOTAL	4	4	33	17	1	6	0	65

1st Oct 2012 to 31st Mar 2013:

Q3 + Q4 2013 (New system)	S&CS	Support Serv.	Comm & Reg	Facilities	Education	Social Serv.	Members	Council
Total number of complaints	5	4	46	11	11	8	2	87
Total stage 1	5	4	43	11	9	7	2	81
Total stage 2	0	0	3	0	2	1	0	6
Stage 1 within timescale	4	1	38	10	7	2	2	64
Stage 1 % in timescale	80%	25%	84%	100%	73%	29%	100%	74%
Stage 2 within timescale	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	4
Stage 2 % within timescale			100%		0%	100%		67%
Extensions authorised stage 2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total Number Upheld	3	1	12	5	3	1	0	25
Total Number Not Upheld	1	3	25	5	5	2	2	43
Total Number Partially Upheld	1	0	9	1	3	3	2	19
By Category	S&CS	Support Serv.	Comm & Reg	Facilities	Education	Social Serv.	Members	Council
Education	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	9
Employee	2	0	13	1	0	0	0	16
Health & Safety	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Member	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Policy Decision	0	1	5	1	1	0	1	9
Quality of Service	3	3	27	9	1	8	0	51
TOTAL	5	4	46	11	11	8	2	87