



REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE ON 12 OCTOBER 2021

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to consider the Complaints Annual Report 2020-21.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III(B)(39) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to developing and monitoring public relations, public reporting, publicity and corporate communications.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i) consider the contents of the Complaints Annual Report;**
- ii) welcome performance as indicated in the report; and**
- iii) approve the report for submission to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO).**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 All councils are required to publish their performance against the national performance indicators set by the SPSO. The attached report presents performance against these performance indicators for the 2020-21 reporting period. **(Appendix 1)**
- 3.2 Complaints handling is part of the council's performance management framework. Members receive updates on complaints performance through routine reports to service committees.
- 3.3 Compared to the 2019-20 figures, there has been a decrease of 30.5% in the number of complaints received and a slight decrease of around 0.1% in the

population size. Consequently, the number of complaints per 1,000 population has decreased by 30.4% compared to 2019-20. The decrease in complaints recording reflects the impact of the pandemic which curtailed our ability to deliver our services in the usual manner and generally there was public acceptance of this.

- 3.4 During 2020-21, 74% of complaints were dealt with at frontline resolution stage compared to 26% dealt with at the investigation stage including those escalated to investigation. This maintains the performance of recent years. It is heartening to see that most complaints continue to be dealt with at frontline, as suggested by the SPSO's guidance on the Model Complaints Handling Procedure to "take every opportunity to resolve service users' complaints at the first point of contact if at all possible."
- 3.5 55% of frontline (stage one) complaints were 'upheld', or 'partially upheld' (Figures 5 & 6) in 2020-21, a 3% increase on 2019-20, demonstrating that where an anticipated level of service falls short, it is acknowledged, learning and improvement outcomes are identified and implemented.

For stage two complaints 'upheld' or 'partially upheld' at the investigation stage, the proportion in 2020-21 of 51%, was marginally higher (3%) compared to last year. Over the past 5 years the proportion of stage two complaints (including after escalation) 'upheld' or 'partially upheld' has consistently been between 40% and 50%.

- 3.6 The impact on complaint handling arising from the pandemic cannot be understated. Staff who normally dealt with their service complaints were assigned to other roles. The majority of staff reverted to home working and it took a considerable amount of time for our IT department to set up access to systems, including those systems required to manage complaints. Services were required to deviate from our Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP), with some complaints normally dealt with at front line (stage 1) put to directly to investigation (stage 2) and on occasions authorised extensions had to be applied. This was recognised at a national level and the SPSO issued a statement advising councils that only Covid related complaints should be dealt with expeditiously in accordance with the CHP.
- 3.7 The appointment of an Education complaints officer contributed to a 46% increase in Schools and Curriculum Development recorded complaints in 2019-20. However, possibly due to the many measures schools had to introduce during lockdown to deal with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were just 22 complaints in 2020-21, similar to the 28 in 2018-19, and less than half the 52 complaints recorded in 2019-20. Thirteen of the complaints received in 2020-21 were resolved at stage two (59%), similar to the proportion in 2019-20 (52%).

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan - Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP)

This report supports the Scottish Government's national outcomes, in particular the commitment to be accountable to the community as stated: "Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs."

Effective complaints reporting is used to ensure the efficient and sustainable delivery of services to meet the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.

(b) Policy and Legal

The SPSO have made it a statutory requirement to have all local authorities publish a Complaints Annual Report.

(c) Financial implications

It is not anticipated that there will be any financial implications.

(d) Risk Implications

Failure to adhere to the statutory SPSO requirement may result in SPSO making a declaration of non-compliance against the Council. Non-compliance with the statutory duty relating to national standards being adopted would present risk in terms of reputational damage and a loss of public confidence in reporting complaints.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications related to this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications related to this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

The Equal Opportunities Officer has been consulted in the preparation of this report and the equalities impact has been identified as uncertain.

The Equal Opportunities Officer has recommended that where services are experiencing high volumes of complaints, the management of respective services should arrange to identify common complaint issues and any learning arising. This will help to ensure that complaints are not arising from situations where customer diversity needs have not been considered or addressed, e.g. disability or cultural issues.

(h) Consultations

The Corporate Management Team have been consulted on the contents of the Complaints Annual Report 2020-21.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Publishing the Complaints Annual Report 2020-21 complies with the SPSO statutory requirement.

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Background Papers:	Held by Author
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