

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 5 June 2018

Complaints Management - Update

Item number 7.8
Report number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council commitment: [Delivering a Council that works for all](#)

Executive Summary

The Information Governance Unit and the Corporate Complaints Management Group (CCMG) led a Council-wide review of complaints management across Council services, and developed a Corporate Complaint Improvement Plan (Improvement Plan) to strengthen arrangements in this area. This report sets out progress against the Improvement Plan, and highlights improved performance figures for 2017-18.

Complaints Management - Update

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to note:
 - 1.1.1 the implementation of the Improvement Plan; and
 - 1.1.2 improved complaints performance across the organisation.

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 complaints management and handling. The model was adopted by the Council in 2013 as part of its own complaints procedures.
- 2.2 The Council's approach to complaints management is service-led. Council services are responsible for responding to all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. However, to provide a more coherent and strategic approach to complaints management, a strategic complaints function was created under the Information Governance Unit in 2016. The Unit provides a single point of reference for advice and support, and leads the work of the Corporate Complaints Management Group (CCMG) which promotes and facilitates better complaints management throughout the organisation.
- 2.3 As part of the work of the CCMG, an Improvement Plan was developed following a Council-wide review and consultation process. The Improvement Plan was based on SPSO's Complaints Improvement Framework which helps organisations assess and demonstrate the effectiveness of their overall complaints handling arrangements through self-assessment criteria.
- 2.4 The development of the Improvement Plan was reported to GRBV in October 2017. The remainder of this report sets out progress and improvements against the plan, and highlights improved performance figures for 2017-18.

3. Main report

- 3.1 The Council-wide review into complaints handling identified several areas for improvement. These included: inconsistencies in recording practices and classification of complaints; not meeting the timescales set by the SPSO;

uncertainty around roles and responsibilities; a lack of assurance around complaint responses; and a need to review and revise Council processes and training.

- 3.2 These and other issues were captured in the Improvement Plan with associated actions. The Improvement Plan is managed and monitored through the Council's Change Management Board and is now nearing completion. Key improvements to date are set out below.
- 3.2.1 A Corporate Complaints Policy has been drafted following extensive consultation with Elected Members, Corporate Leadership Team, Council services, the SPSO and members of the public. It sets out agreed standards for recording, managing and reporting complaints, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities in relation to complaints management. It also confirms the Council's commitment to using complaints in a positive way as a learning tool to improve service delivery and the customer experience. The policy will be presented to the Council's Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee for approval in August 2018.
- 3.2.2 The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure has also been subject to extensive consultation and revised as appropriate to support the new Corporate Complaints Policy. It also incorporates the latest best practice guidance from the SPSO, and the standards developed by the Scottish Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network. This includes defining agreed complaint categories which will enable consistent recording across the organisation, and increase the Council's ability to analyse complaints data and learn from it.
- 3.2.3 The streamlining of Council systems which are used to record complaints will also help to promote consistent recording and analysis, and reduce duplication. The majority of Council services are now using Capture for complaints management, significantly reducing the number of systems used to four (Capture, Confirm, Datix and Jadu). This is a major step forward in advance of the proposed corporate CRM solution. A Capture Working Group has also been established to ensure that the system is used in a consistent way when recording and tracking complaints.
- 3.2.4 An outreach and engagement programme has also been established to highlight changes and to promote the importance of good complaint handling. This included: regular communications to employees, engagement with Council services, a revised customer satisfaction survey, and a new complaints leaflet. As part of this programme, an Internal Complaint Handlers Network has been set up to share best practice and learning around complaints management, and to advocate for a culture that values and learns from complaints.
- 3.2.5 Central to the complaints management process is the need for appropriate levels of training and awareness to support policy and procedure. The Council's e-learning module on handling complaints for Council employees is

being revised and is due to be launched in conjunction with the approved Corporate Complaints Policy in August.

- 3.2.6 Face to face training is also being developed around undertaking investigations and responding to Stage 2 complaints which can be complex and difficult. This is due to be launched in August and will be underpinned by a quality assurance programme specifically directed at Stage 2 complaints. The methodology and approach for the assurance work has been established, and will help to identify opportunities to improve practices, prior to any regulatory action being taken.
- 3.3 The appendix to this report contains the Council's Complaints Analysis for 2017-2018 which sets out comparative figures for the last three years. Based on the figures provided by service areas, the number of complaints received has decreased from 19,719 in 2016-17 to 10,541 in 2017-18. This welcome trend is also reflected in the number of complaints closed which has shown a decrease from 16,917 in 2016-17 to 9,863 in 2016-17. Nevertheless, of the total complaints received over the last financial year, only 61% were answered within the timescales set out by the SPSO.
- 3.4 There is clearly a need for further and sustained improvement and the CCMG and Internal Complaint Handlers Network will continue to monitor and promote compliance with the revised complaints management framework. However, to ensure appropriate levels of visibility and support around complaints management, performance information will form part of the Council's Performance Framework with bi-annual reporting to CLT and Elected Members.
- 3.5 It is envisaged as the improvements set out in this report are embedded across Council services, that the management of complaints will improve and that a positive complaints culture will continue to evolve.

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 Improvement Plan was 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.

8. Sustainability impact

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

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 There has been extensive consultation and engagement with Elected Members, Council services and external stakeholders in implementing the Improvement Plan, including an emphasis on customer experience and expectations.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [City of Edinburgh Council Complaints Procedure](#)
- 10.2 [City of Edinburgh Council Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan](#)
- 10.3 [Complaints Management, Item 7.1, Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee, 31 October 2017](#)

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11. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Complaints Analysis 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018

Edinburgh Council Complaints Analysis

1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018



A Forward Looking Council



An Empowering Council

Introduction

This year the Council has completed a corporate review of its strategic management of complaints, and has been implementing the Corporate Complaints Improvement Plan.

Key areas of developments include:

- Development of a Complaints Policy including stakeholder and public consultation.
- Review and revision of the Complaints Procedure.
- Review of Corporate Complaints Management Group (CCMG) to facilitate strategic oversight of complaints management.
- Development of training options and establishment of a Complaint Handlers Network to enable services who are invited to share best practice.
- Review of complaint recording to enable improved reporting and analysis (this includes the introduction of standard complaint categories and the establishment of a Capture User Group).
- Development of a Customer Satisfaction Survey to align with the SPSO's requirements.
- Development of a Quality Assurance process to monitor Stage 2 complaint investigations.
- Revised reporting to Corporate Leadership Team.

Complaints closed

9,863

Place

Q1 – 1887
Q2 – 1806
Q3 – 1684
Q4 - 1886

Resources

Q1 – 459
Q2 – 324
Q3 – 371
Q4 - 303

C&F

Q1 – 118
Q2 – 91
Q3 – 140
Q4 - 140

S&SC

Q1 – 87
Q2 – 75
Q3 – 87
Q4 - 90

Social Work

Q1 – 29
EHSCP
Q2 – 23
Q3 – 44
Q4 - 36

Chief Exec

Q1 – 6
Q2 – 14
Q3 – 8
Q4 - 26

Multi

Q1 – 24
Q2 – 55
Q3 – 23
Q4 - 25

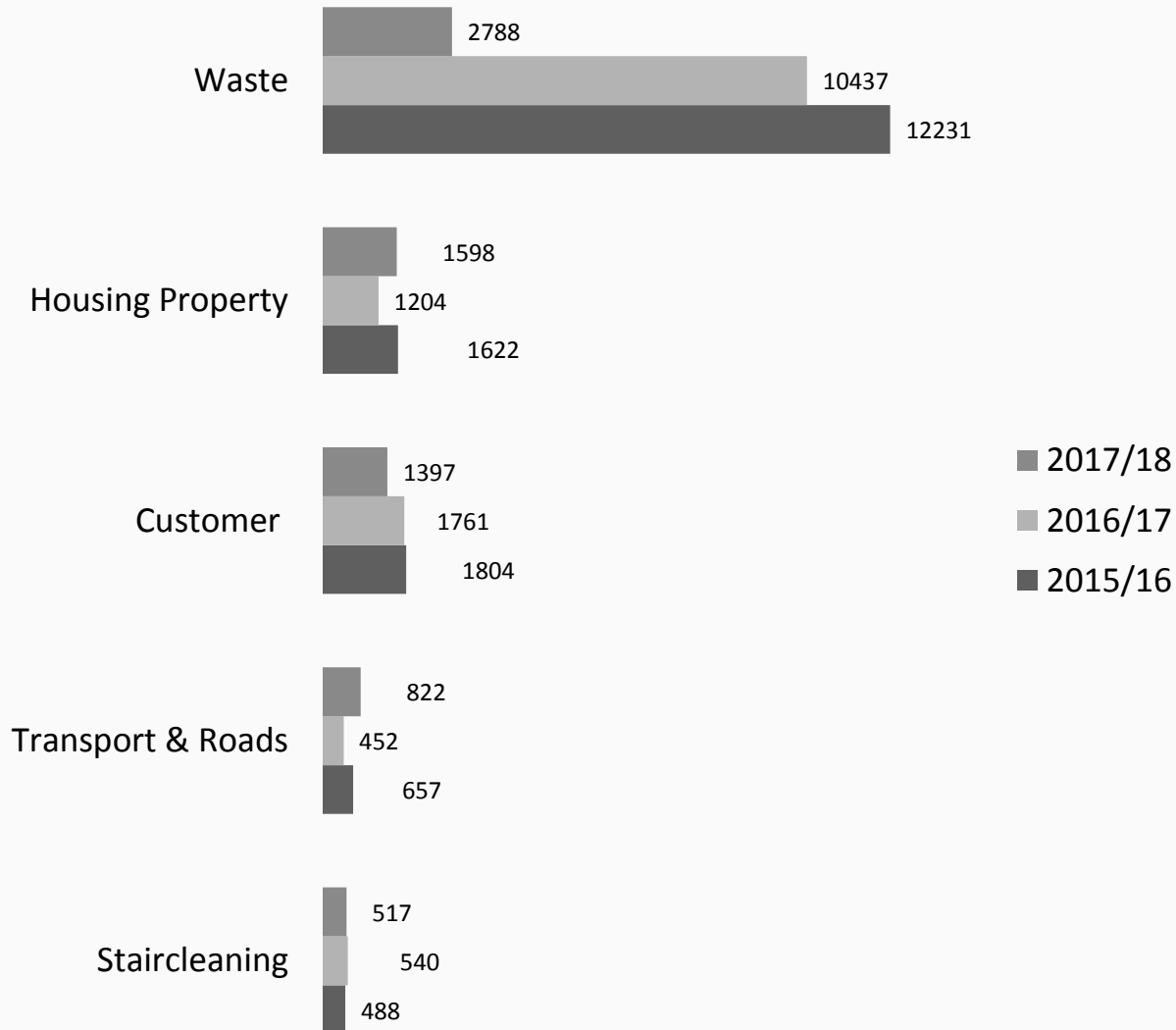
- 8,942 (91%) of the total number of complaints closed were frontline resolutions (stage 1) and 921 (9%) were investigations (stage 2).
- 2,788 complaints related to Waste (28%), followed by 1,598 complaints for Housing Property (16%).
- This is a significant improvement in comparison to previous years where the total number of complaints closed were 16,917 (2016/17) and 20,065 (2015/16).
- This improvement can primarily be attributed to the significant decrease in Waste complaints: 10,437 (2016/17) and 12,231 (2015/16).

Performance against timescales

	Apr-Jun 17	Jul-Sept 17	Oct-Dec 17	Jan-Mar 18	2017/18
Chief Executive	33%	29%	63%	27%	33% (18/54)
Communities & Families	73%	62%	61%	72%	67% (328/489)
Resources	86%	90%	61%	77%	79% (1151/1459)
Place	58%	60%	64%	51%	58% (4214/7263)
Safer & Stronger	52%	53%	59%	43%	52% (175/339)
Social Work	14%	17%	N/A	N/A	14% (4/29)
EHSCP	N/A	N/A	16%	14%	16% (16/103)
Multi Directorate	70%	56%	65%	32%	56% (71/127)

- Overall, for 2017/18 for the total number of complaints, 61% of our customers received a response to their complaint within the timescales as set out by the SPSO. This is an improvement compared to 2016/17 where 54% were responded to within timescales. However it is a decrease in performance compared to 2015/16 with 69% of customers responded to.

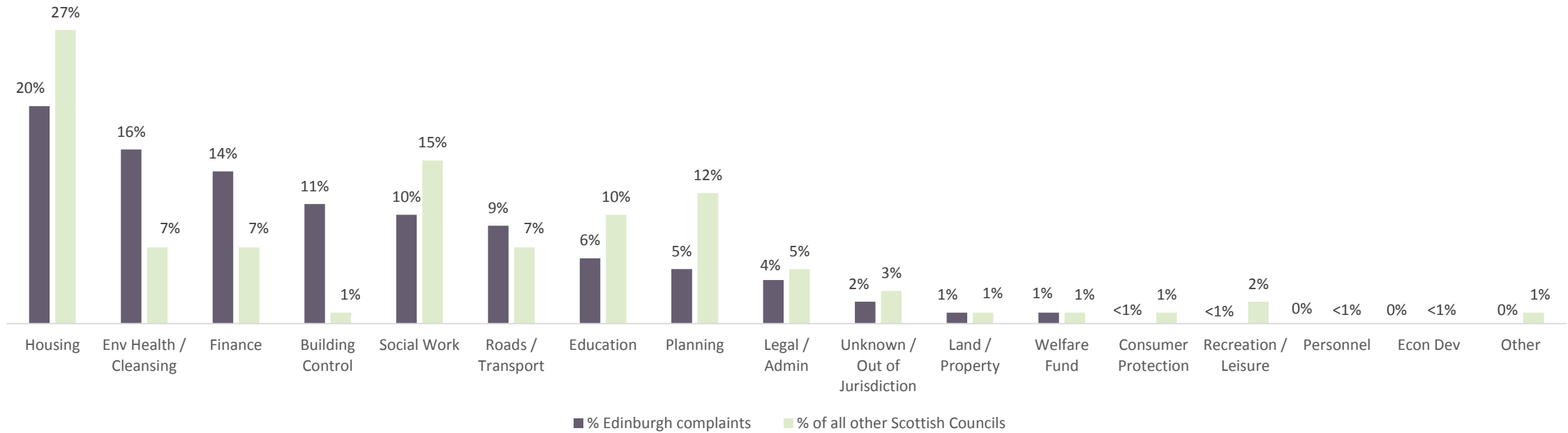
Top 5 sources of complaints



- Waste complaints have significantly decreased over the last 3 years. The implementation of key actions from the Waste & Cleansing Improvement Plan (approved in Nov 16) have all had a positive impact on the overall performance of the service. Further service improvements are planned over the 2018/19 period.
- Customer (Council Tax, Benefits, Non-Domestic Rates, Customer Hub) has seen a steady decrease in the number of complaints over the last 3 years. This improvement can be attributed to improved customer care training; an improved automated service; channel shift; reduced backlogs and investment in internal resources.

SPSO complaints comparison with whole sector

Edinburgh complaints to SPSO compared to all other Scottish Councils



- The total number of complaints received by the SPSO for all Scottish Local Authorities in 2016-17 was 1,499 (compared to 1,859 for 2015-16).
- 192 of these were about Edinburgh, followed by 138 for Glasgow.
- The majority of complaints from Edinburgh to the SPSO related to Housing (38), Environmental Health & Cleansing (31), Finance (26) and Building Control (21).
- Out of the 192 complaints made about Edinburgh, 21 (11%) were upheld / part upheld (compared to 15 out of 259 (8%) for 2015-16).

Next Steps

- Launch of the Complaints Policy following Committee approval in summer.
- Finalise and roll out training programme for investigating officers (stage 2) to ensure a consistent approach. This will include a review of the complaints e-learning module for all staff.
- Quality Assurance programme to monitor stage 2 investigations will commence in summer.
- Agree reporting format to Senior Management Teams, to include more detailed analysis for each service.

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A Forward Looking Council



An Empowering Council