
COMPLAINTS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2015/16

Report by Service Director Neighbourhood Services

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

16 August 2016

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report presents Scottish Borders Council's Complaints Annual Performance Report for 2015-16, which provides data for the eight performance indicators the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) require all Local Authorities to report against each year.**
- 1.2 A summary of the main changes to performance in 2015-16 is provided in Section 4 of this report. The changes include an overall reduction in the number of complaints received, a percentage increase in the number of complaints handled at Stage One and a reduction in the number of complaints upheld which had been escalated from Stage One to Stage Two. This is then followed by a summary of benchmarking data from 2014-15, in Section 5. Appendix 1 provides more detail for each of the eight Performance Indicators.
- 1.3 A number of areas for improvement are committed to in Section 6 of the annual report. In summary these commitments are:
- a. To improve responses given in respect of complaints not upheld at Stage One, with a view to reducing the number of complaints escalated to Stage Two.
 - b. To improve the response times of complaints handled at Stage Two and those escalated from Stage One to Stage Two.
 - c. To improve the complaint Customer Satisfaction Survey to obtain a better understanding of the specific reasons for complainants satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
 - d. To expand the volume of compliments and other comments captured and ensure these are reflected alongside the arrangements in place for handling complaints.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee:-**
- (a) **Notes the performance of handling complaints for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016;**
 - (b) **Endorses the identified improvement actions as follows:**
 - (i) **To improve responses given in respect of complaints not upheld at Stage One, with a view to reducing the number of complaints escalated to Stage Two.**

- (ii) To improve the response times of complaints handled at Stage Two and those escalated from Stage One to Stage Two.**
 - (iii) To improve the complaint Customer Satisfaction Survey to obtain a better understanding of the specific reasons for complainants satisfaction or dissatisfaction.**
 - (iv) To expand the volume of compliments and other comments captured and ensure these are reflected alongside the arrangements in place for handling complaints.**
- (c) Approves the annual report to be submitted to the SPSO and for the Council to publish the report.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 gave the SPSO the authority to lead the development of a complaints handling procedure to be used across the public sector.
- 3.2 In May 2012, the SPSO issued guidance on the handling of complaints, 'Local Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure', and in November 2012 Scottish Borders Council approved a 'Complaints Handling Procedure' (CHP) based on this guidance which then became publicly available.
- 3.3 In August 2014, the SPSO issued guidance stating that the annual performance of Local Authorities handling of complaints should be formally presented in an annual report across eight specified key performance indicators. It was later confirmed that this report should be published.
- 3.4 Members are kept aware of key SPSO indicators on a quarterly basis through Scottish Borders Council's Corporate Performance reporting to Executive Committee. This covers not only the quarterly data, but also the action being taken within services to maintain or improve performance, and the case studies that demonstrate how SBC is learning from complaints. This information is also reported publicly on a quarterly basis.
- 3.5 In November 2015 Scottish Borders Council agreed with the SPSO that the SPSO decisions, recommendations and subsequent actions would be reported in the Complaints Annual Performance Report.
- 3.6 Scottish Borders Council's first Complaints Annual Performance Report was published in January 2015. This is the third such report and covers 2015-16 performance.

4 PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 Scottish Borders Council received 564 valid complaints in 2015/16. This compares with 619 in 2014/15, a reduction of 55 complaints.
- 4.2 In 2015/16 Scottish Borders Council handled 24 fewer complaints at Stage One than in the previous year.

- 4.3 Despite this overall reduction in numbers handled, there was an increase in the percentage of complaints handled at Stage One from 81.4% in 2014/15 to 85.7% in 2015/16. As a result fewer complaints were closed at Stage Two in 2015/16 which is a positive trend to be encouraged, as it provides the customer with a quicker response and saves the Council on resources as Stage Two complaints involve more work.
- 4.4 Whilst fewer complaints were handled at Stage One, Scottish Borders Council's performance in closing these complaints within the prescribed timescales fell slightly from 86.9% in 2014/15 to 85.2% in 2015/16.
- 4.5 Overall there has been very little change in any aspect of Scottish Borders Council's performance at Stage Two.
- 4.6 The number of closed complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two has increased by 7 in 2015/16. 83.3% of the escalated complaints were closed within the prescribed timescale of 20 working days. This compares to 60.9% in 2014-15 which is a significant improvement.
- 4.7 55.6% of complaints were not upheld at Stage One. 6.3% of all complaints handled at Stage One were escalated to Stage Two. 76.7% of these escalated complaints were not upheld compared to 52.2% in 2014/15. This is a significant improvement compared to the previous year and supports the original decision to not uphold the complaint at Stage One.
- 4.8 Just over half of the complainants (51.5%) who completed the Complaint Satisfaction Survey were either very satisfied or satisfied with the complaints process and their experience of making a complaint. Just over a third (35.5%) were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied and the remaining 13% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or did not know.

5 BENCHMARKING

- 5.1 Each year a benchmarking exercise is undertaken by the Local Authority Complaint Handling Network (LACHN) and the SPSO to gather Performance Indicator statistics from each Local Authority. It should be noted this benchmarking is using 2014-15 data as the 2015-16 data is not yet available for other Local Authorities or nationally.
- 5.2 The LACHN is made up of representatives from all Scottish Local Authorities and meets regularly to review complaint handling. Local Authorities work within Family Groups which have similar geographic and/or demographic characteristics.
- 5.3 Officers have obtained permission from two Local Authorities from within Scottish Borders Council's Family Group to compare SBC's performance against theirs, and against the national average.
- 5.4 In 2014/15, Scottish Borders Council received 5.4 complaints per 1000 of the population, which compares favourably with the national average of 12.2.
- 5.5 Scottish Borders Council handled 81.4% of complaints at Stage One, which is in line with the national average and is significantly higher than both Argyll & Bute Council at 76.8% and Aberdeenshire Council at 62.1%.

- 5.6 On average it has taken Scottish Borders Council longer to respond to complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two than the national average and Argyll & Bute Council, although Scottish Borders Council responds quicker than Aberdeenshire Council. It should be noted that the average times for all three Authorities are within the prescribed 20 working days timescale.

6 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- 6.1 Scottish Borders Council is continuously looking to improve its services. In the 2014-15 performance report three key areas were identified for improvement.
- 6.2 The findings carried forward from the 2014-15 were to increase the number of complaints closed within the timescales at all three stages of complaint handling, to introduce a Customer Satisfaction Survey and to undertake benchmarking analysis. Success has been achieved in all three key areas; although the improvement plan highlights the need to continue to make improvements in two of the three areas.
- 6.3 Scottish Borders Council's Complaint Officer Group has undertaken to review responses issued to customers at Stage One. By doing this, improvement may be made in future communications given to complainants to aid their understanding of the outcome of their complaint and avoid escalation to the next stage.
- 6.4 As a group, the Complaint Officers will monitor more closely performance around response times particularly at Stage Two and complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two.
- 6.5 Changes will be made to the Customer Satisfaction Survey to gather additional information for each question asked. This will allow a better understanding of the specific reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
- 6.6 To expand the volume of compliments and other comments captured and ensure these are reflected alongside the arrangements in place for reporting complaints. This improvement has been identified as an improvement action within Scottish Borders Council's Annual Governance Statement 2015-16.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

This report satisfies the requirements as set down by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) in respect of complaints handling performance monitoring and reporting. Approval of the report, its submission to SPSO and publication of the report will mitigate the risk of non-compliance with required practice.

