

**Annual Complaint Handling Report 2017/18 and SPSO Annual Statistics  
pertaining to Midlothian Council cases handled in 2017-18****Report by Dr Grace Vickers, Chief Executive****1 Purpose of Report**

The main outcome of the report is to provide Cabinet, and the ensuing PRS Committee with the Annual Complaint Handling Report for 2017/18 (appendix 1). The report was recently published on Midlothian Council's website following endorsement by CMT at the meeting of 27 March 2019.

This is the third report of its kind, and it provides an annual review and assessment of complaints information which includes some useful customer feedback material and an analysis of what the results could suggest. As a result of its publication, customers and staff alike are provided with:

- Evidence of how the council values complaints - by sharing the information whilst appropriately comparing the data to other local authorities and the Scottish averages;
- Essential information relating to the complaints procedure and outcomes;
- Knowledge about the importance of managing the process;
- A modest segment that relates to customer insight information based solely on the data;
- A summary of the compliments that the council receives in addition to complaints;
- Case studies that highlight how the council has learned and improved;

The report also provides an update of statistics shared with us by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) about how they have handled complaint cases by Midlothian customers, and which services were being complained about to them. Outcome decisions to cases are published on the SPSO's website.

For ease, there is a summary of this data within the Annual Complaint Handling Report (pages 26/27), and all the data in its original format is provided in appendix 2.

## 2 Background

- 2.1** The model Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) was developed for public services in line with the recommendations of the Sinclair report (<http://www.gov.scot>) which tasked the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to simplify and improve complaints handling by developing a standardised CHP. This was arranged within the framework of the SPSO Statement of Complaint Handling Principles, which is approved by the Scottish Parliament, and Guidance on a Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

The emphasis in the CHP is on quicker and simpler complaints handling with local, early resolution by empowered and well trained staff. The aim is to help bodies 'get it right first time' with a focus on resolving complaints at the frontline wherever possible. There is also an emphasis on valuing complaints – recording all complaints, reporting key information and using the lessons learned to improve service delivery.

The aim of standardising and streamlining CHPs has been at the core of this work, so all public service model CHPs are closely aligned. The key elements of each model CHP will be the same for all sectors, including:

- A shared definition of what is and what is not a complaint
- A two stage process where complaints are resolved as close to the frontline as possible
- Frontline resolution of complaints within five working days
- An investigation stage of 20 working days, which provides the organisation's final decision
- Recording of all complaints
- Active learning from complaints through reporting and publicising complaints information.

## 2.2 Annual Complaint Handling Report

In line with the local intelligence tool that the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) applies and reports on, value is also added to the complaints report using the comparative element. There is an established benchmarking sub-group for complaints, a group composed of members from the mainstream Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network group (LACHN). The complaints statistics are therefore likened to previous years', as well as to the Scottish average and the family group average.

A focal point of the document is the information provided under the heading 'Annual Complaints Handled by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)'. This section provides a summary of the information about cases that were handled directly by the SPSO. It is useful to know how many of Midlothian's customers have approached the SPSO, and how their queries have been processed.

## Report Implications

### 3.1 Resource

The requirement to complete and publish an Annual Complaints Handling Report sits within the current Customer Service Improvement Officer role however, CMT are asked to note that developing the complaints function to ensure a 'fit for purpose' and sustainable framework will require support from managers and services as part of the ongoing performance management and improvement agenda.

The developing complaints agenda will also be subject to ongoing review in terms of the focus and responsibilities of the current Customer Service Improvement Officer role to ensure that the role and outcomes continue to meet the ongoing needs of the Council in relation to complaint handling and reporting.

### 3.2 Risk

Failure to meet the statutory requirements as they relate to complaint handling and SPSO reporting presents a risk. Publishing this document seeks to mitigate the risk and illustrates how feedback information provided by the council's customers is valued.

### 3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

### 3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

This report does not relate directly to the key priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan; however the proposed action supports the ongoing improvement agenda across a number of the thematic areas.

### 3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The annual report and review of the complaints framework will provide a number of benefits that includes an enhanced understanding of the complaint handling process, clarity about the indicators, and statistical data that is intelligible along with some analysis and discussion about what the results could mean. It will compliment what is already reported and published, but the rationale for the new document is that the format is more accessible and clearer. The main benefit is that our obligation to report on the improvements/remedial action that we have made as a result of the feedback we receive, and how we have learned from complaints is detailed within the document.

### **3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

The Council is proactively responding to improvement opportunities noted as part of the complaints process.

### **3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

The Council is using the evidence from complaints as another form of customer feedback to assist in its delivery of services and processes within the divisions.

### **3.8 Ensuring Equalities**

Whilst not directly impacting on equalities, information is provided about the opportunity to reformat the document into a legible format or language to accommodate additional needs or those whose first language is not English. This is in line with the Equalities Act 2010.

### **3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

There are no sustainability issues with regard to this report.

### **3.10 IT Issues**

Future development work will be informed by the proposed provision of a new CRM system

## **4 Recommendations**

Cabinet and PRS are asked to;

- I) Note the recent publication of the Annual Complaint Handling Report provided in appendix 1.
- II) Note the statistics pertaining to Midlothian Council provided to us by the SPSO.

**Date March 2019**

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#### **Background Papers:**

##### **Appendix 1**

**Annual Complaints Report inc SPSO Summary Data 1617 V2**

##### **Appendix 2**

**Statistics pertaining to complaints about Midlothian Council that the SPSO looked at during 2017/18.**