

SPSO Annual Statistics for Midlothian Council cases handled in 2016-17**Report by: Kenneth Lawrie, Chief Executive****1 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is provide Cabinet with an update regarding the annual Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) letter and statistics relating to Midlothian Council complaint cases handled by the SPSO for 2016/17 and for which decisions were published online in October 2017.

In addition the report also presents the Annual Complaints Report, recently approved for publication on the Council's website by the Corporate Management Team at their meeting dated 29 November 2017. Members should note that that, in line with statutory requirements, the report provides an annual review and assessment of complaints for Midlothian Council.

2 Background**2.1 Annual Complaint Statistics Relating to Cases about Midlothian Council that were Processed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) handles complaints about public services in Scotland. The Ombudsman service is independent of government and has a duty to act impartially. The SPSO also shares learning from its work to improve service delivery across the public services spectrum in Scotland. The office carries out awareness-raising activities with the general public and bodies under their jurisdiction, and promotes good complaints handling by public service providers in Scotland. The SPSO has a separate website to support best practice in complaints handling and provides the Complaint Handling Procedure/Policy template which all local authorities, including Midlothian, apply in relation to handling complaints.

Customers who have used Midlothian Council's established Complaint Handling Procedure, and who remain dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which their complaint has been handled, are signposted by the council to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO). Provided it is within their jurisdiction, the SPSO will review the complaint and consequently reach a decision. Depending on the decision, the SPSO will make recommendations

to the authority accordingly. This is to encourage lasting improvements to services so that the trust and confidence of the public is restored.

Appendix 1 provides an account of the complaints data about Midlothian Council that the SPSO has looked at and published on their website in October 2017. An extract of the information shown in appendix 1 is also included in the Annual Complaints Handling report (appendix 2).

2.2 Annual Complaints Handling Report

The Annual Complaints Handling Report that is presented in appendix 2 responds to SPSO requirement to publish an annual complaints report detailing performance against the complaints performance indicators. The report provides information on customer complaints received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017; this is the first of expected annual reports and is in addition to the current reporting of complaints via Heads of Service quarterly performance reports, and the proposed quarterly update and review of complaints report to the Corporate Management Team.

The report is intended to be more than simply another set of data, if it is used well it should provide an opportunity to understand complaints to give insight into services which, in turn enables learning and improvement.

The data presented in this way also provides a platform for Midlothian Council and others to benchmark performance and to identify and work together on common challenges.

A focal point of the new report is the service specific case studies which provide the opportunity to learn from and/or make improvements to existing systems of work, procedures, service level agreements and/or policies based on feedback from our customers.

Furthermore, the new report advises areas for progression that will allow for improvements to be made, and outlines the Council's obligations in respect of the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) with particular reference to the reporting of learning from complaints.

In addition to responding to the statutory need to publish an annual report the opportunity to re-focus the complaints procedure going forward has also been taken and is reflected in the 'future considerations' section within the report which will inform a wider action and implementation plan for the complaints function moving forward.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

The SPSO monitoring and reporting activity relating to complaints for Midlothian Council is already incorporated within the current Customer

Service Improvement Officer role within the Policy and Scrutiny Team and therefore this report has no additional resource requirements.

3.2 Risk

Failure to meet the statutory requirements as they relate to complaint handling and SPSO reporting presents a risk which is mitigated by a continuing focus on complaint reporting requirements via existing governance and reporting structures.

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 approach taken for complaints 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 which include an improved understanding of the complaint handling process, clarity about the indicators, and statistical data that is intelligible and provides the opportunity for meaningful analysis.

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

Whilst not directly linked to this report development work to the Customer Relationship Management system is already underway that will streamline the recording process and thereby improve the pathway in which the process is carried out. Following training this will ultimately enhance staff's understanding of the process and will make for more accurate reporting.

4. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to;

- I) Note the statistics presented in appendix 1 of this report, a summary of which is highlighted in Annual Complaints Report 2016/17 (appendix 2).
- II) Note the newly published Annual Complaints Report provided in appendix 2.

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Appendix 1

Statistics pertaining to complaints about Midlothian Council that the SPSO looked at during 2016/17.

Appendix 2

Annual Complaints Report inc SPSO Data 1617 V2