

## **S8. Complaints Annual Report 2016/17**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the Complaints Annual Report for 2016/17.

The Annual Report set out performance, against 8 benchmarked indicators:-

- Complaints received per 1,000 population;
- Number of complaints closed;
- Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld;
- Average response times;
- Performance against timescales;
- Number of cases where an extension is authorised;
- Customer satisfaction;
- Learning from complaints.

In 2016/17 the Council had received slightly fewer complaints than in 2015/16 (15.4 per 1000 population compared to 16 per 1000 population). Over 90% had been closed at stage 1 of the Complaints Handling Process and 80% had been closed by the stage 2 deadline in terms of outcome 47.9% had been upheld or partially upheld at stage 1 and 45% had been upheld or partially upheld at stage 2.

The committee discussed the findings of the scrutiny panel which had made recommendations in regard to complaints handling and sought assurance that these had been implemented. The Director of Corporate and Housing Services confirmed that these had been agreed by the Executive on 21 March 2017 (ref EX126) and had been implemented by officers. Members noted that in terms of the overall number of interactions with the public Council wide, the number of complaints was small. However, it was important that any complaints received are efficiently and effectively handled. In this regard, members asked whether training was provided to all staff. The Communications and Participation Manager stated that training was provided on the complaints handling process. It was important that Council was not defensive about complaints and recognised the value, in terms of public satisfaction and improving service delivery, that complaints are handled sensitively and that lessons are learned. The Director of Development Services highlighted the APDS process which allowed training to be tailored to individual needs. In response to a question, the Communications and Participation Manager confirmed that online equalities and diversity training was available.

The committee then considered the implementation of the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) within Children's Services. The process had been revised so that first stage complaints would be dealt with at school level rather than at the centre. This was seen as a positive innovation by members but it was important that this was communicated to parents. It was suggested that it may a barrier previously that complaints about a school matter was dealt with centrally and it was important that parents were aware of the change in the process.

The committee then considered the role of elected members in supporting constituents who wished to make or who had made complaints and stated that all members should be aware of the CHP. In this regard, it was suggested by members that the terminology used was unclear and provided a barrier to understanding and sought clarity on how multiservice complaints were handled. The Communications and Participation Manager advised that in the case of multiservice complaints, a lead service would be identified and it would have responsibility for pulling together the response. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) guidance was followed for such complaints.

The committee considered that new members in particular may fully understand their role in both raising complaints on behalf of constituents or in supporting constituents who had made complaints but who were not satisfied after stage 1. Members may tend to raise issues brought by constituents as a member's enquiry rather than as a complaint. Both processes are different and therefore clarity on the correct approach was sought. The Communications and Participation Manager concurred that this was an area which could be looked at further and indicated that a report would be brought to committee so that it could be looked at in more depth. The Director of Development Services stated that if a complaint was received as part of a member's enquiry it would be treated as a complaint. The convener responded that this highlighted a grey area around the members' role once the enquiry had been made.

## **Decision**

**The Committee noted the Council's complaints performance between April 2016 and March 2017.**