

Agenda Item 8

Complaints Annual Report 2018/19

Falkirk Council

Title: Complaints Annual Report 2018/19
Meeting: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 12 September 2019
Submitted By: Director of Corporate & Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Council's Complaints Annual Report for 2018/19 (Appendix 1).

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **The Scrutiny Committee is asked to :-**

(1) consider the Council's complaints performance between April 2018 and March 2019.

3. Background

- 3.1 As Members will be aware, the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the model developed by the SPSO. The model CHP applies to all local authorities and all local authority services.
- 3.2 The Council's CHP is based on a two stage process, the first being frontline resolution and the second being investigation. The term "frontline" is used to mean the first stage of the complaints procedure, not a job role within the Council.
- **Frontline resolution** – issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation. This means "on the spot" apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint within five working days or less. Complaints are addressed by staff or referred to the appropriate point for resolution. Complaint details, outcome and action taken are recorded and used for service improvement.
 - **Investigation** – issues that have not been resolved at the first stage or that are complex, serious or "high risk". This means a definitive response is provided within 20 working days following a thorough investigation of the points raised. Responses are signed off by senior management. Senior management are expected to have an active interest in complaints and to ensure the information gathered is used to improve services.
- 3.3 The second stage investigation is the Council's final opportunity to address a complaint before it is considered by the SPSO. Investigations are carried out by Service Unit Managers, with the final complaints responses signed off at

Head of Service level or above. Following investigation, if customers are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with their complaint, they can ask the SPSO to look at it.

- 3.4 Each Service has a nominated lead officer for complaints and a Complaints Officers' Working Group is in place. At a national level, a Local Authority Complaints Handlers network has been established in conjunction with the SPSO and a Knowledge Hub forum has been set up so that Councils can share good practice and common queries. Falkirk Council is part of this group which meets on a quarterly basis.

4. Considerations

- 4.1 The SPSO has set eight indicators for complaints performance and Councils are required to report on these on a yearly basis and to publish an annual complaints report. The indicators are:

- 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.

- 4.2 Appendix 1 provides information on complaints handling within the Council during 2018/19. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO and compares it with the previous year. National benchmarking information is not available, however in previous years the figures for Falkirk Council were close to or better than the national average in terms of the number of complaints closed at stage one and the number of complaints upheld.

- 4.3 In 2018/19, the Council received more complaints per 1,000 population than in the previous year (22.9 compared to 17.7) and 90% of these were closed at stage one. In total 3,670 complaints were received. The areas of service that generated the highest volume of complaints were housing repairs, household waste collection, staff conduct, local schools and Council Tax. There was an increase in complaints about housing repairs, with 759 in 2018/19 compared to 388 in 2017/18. Complaints about household waste collection fell from 602 to 456 in the same period.

- 4.4 There was no significant variance in the number of complaints closed at stage two or the number closed at stage two after escalation. Escalated complaints are those that proceed straight to stage two due to being serious, high risk or requiring complex investigation.

- 4.5 In terms of performance against timescales, 87% of stage one complaints were closed within the five day deadline and 58% of stage two complaints were closed within the 20 day deadline. This is a drop from 69% of stage two complaints closed within the timescale in 2017/18 and a further drop from 79% in 2016/17. It should be noted that relatively few complaints are considered at stage two, only 62 in 2018/19 and 35 in 2017/18.

4.6 51% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld at stage one and 39% were upheld or partially upheld at stage two. The figures for 2017/18 were 54% and 43% respectively. There was a significant drop in the number of complaints referred to the SPSO for resolution, from 49 last year to 22 in 2018/19

4.7 The top ten areas for complaints received from 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019 were:

Stage 1 Top 10 Complaints

Housing repairs	717
Household waste collection	436
Staff conduct	391
Local schools	125
Council tax account enquiries	113
Road maintenance	102
Household waste assisted collection	98
Bulky household waste collection	78
Other	76
Tenant support	57

Stage 2 Top 10 Complaints

Housing repairs	42
Staff conduct	32
Local schools	29
Household waste collection	20
Development control	14
Road maintenance	14
Communal housing repairs	13
Housing nuisance	13
Housing services	10
Children & young people, preventative services	9

4.8 Customer satisfaction with contact with the Council is captured regularly using a variety of channels. In last year's annual report we included the findings of a survey of our Citizens Panel to see how satisfied they were with how the Council deals with complaints. This needs to be refreshed and the complaints officers' working group is looking at options such as surveying all customers at the end of the process to gather their views. This means an annual evaluation could be carried out and improvements made where required.

4.9 How the Council learns from complaints was the subject of a Scrutiny Panel led by Members in 2017. The panel involved Members hearing a range of evidence about how the Council handles complaints, the procedures that are followed, how we learn from complaints and how our performance compares with other Councils. The panel involved complaints leads from across the Council who presented to Members on the particular issues relating to complaints within major service delivery areas, such as waste and housing. Members also heard evidence from representatives of the Complaints Standards Authority who provided an overview of complaints from the perspective of the SPSO. A number of improvement actions arose from the Scrutiny Panel and have been put in place. These include monitoring the areas which receive the highest number of complaints, information on which is

included in this report, offering training on complaints to Members as part of their induction training and continuing to participate actively in the work of the Local Authority Complaints Network which looks at common issues, benchmarking and areas for improvement.

- 4.10 The SPSO is clear that Councils should have processes in place to help them learn from complaints and review and change service delivery if required. The annual report contains examples of how complaints learning has been applied in Services. This includes additional training for staff, implementation of improved telephony in the contact centre and the introduction of online forms.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 This report has been prepared in consultation with the Corporate Complaints Group.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resources

- 6.2 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

- 6.3 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risk

- 6.4 There are no risk implications arising from this report.

Equalities

- 6.5 No equalities assessment was required.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.6 No sustainability assessment was required.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 As noted in the report, the Council is required to report on complaints performance on an annual basis and publishing the information in Appendix 1 will fulfil that obligation.

Director of Corporate & Housing Services

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Appendices

Falkirk Council Complaints Annual Report 2018/19

List of Background Papers:

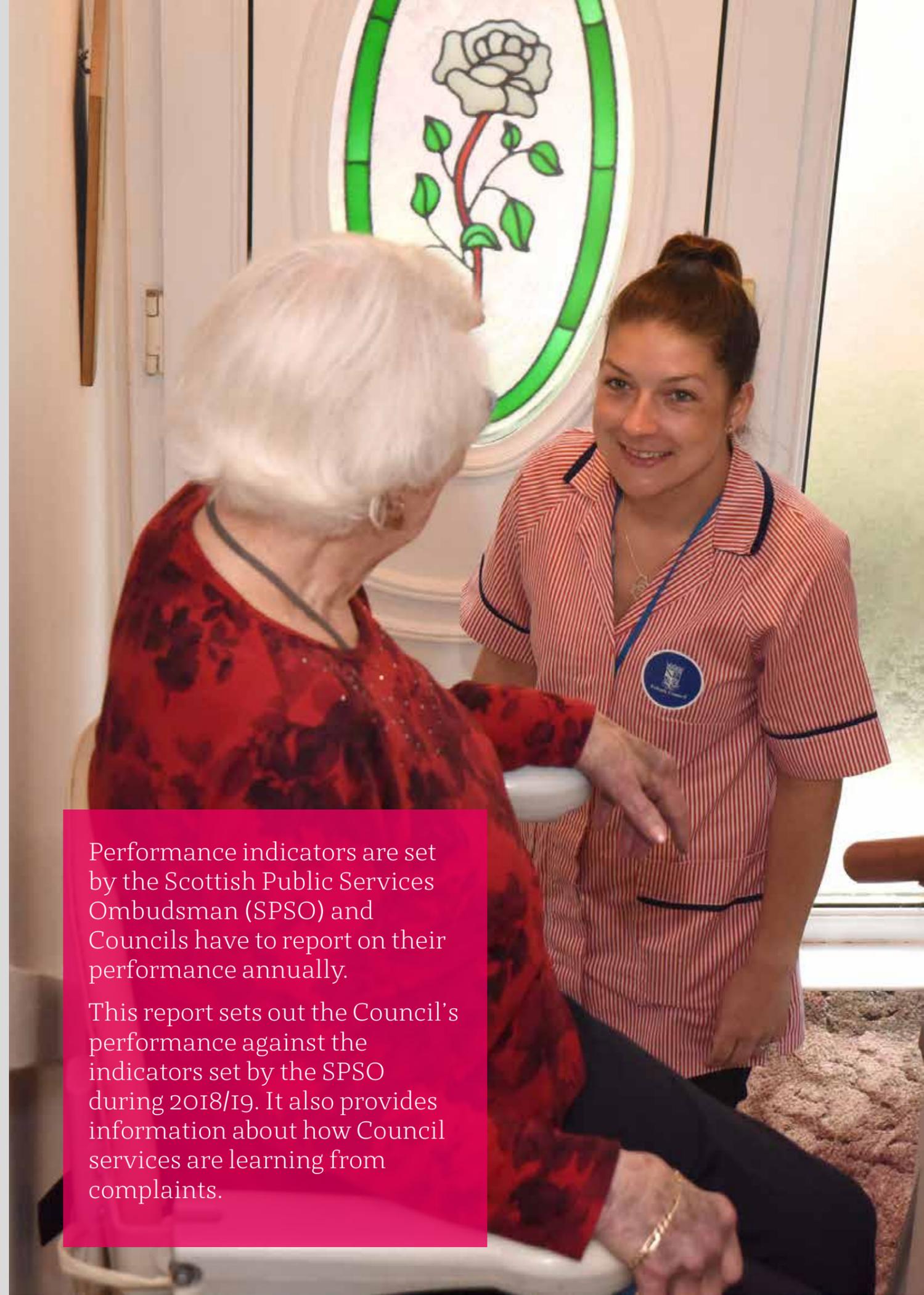
The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

None

Falkirk
Council
Complaints
Annual
Report
2018/19

Falkirk Council takes complaints seriously and wants to learn from them.

This report provides information about how the Council dealt with complaints from the public during 2018/19.



Performance indicators are set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and Councils have to report on their performance annually.

This report sets out the Council's performance against the indicators set by the SPSO during 2018/19. It also provides information about how Council services are learning from complaints.



Our Complaints Procedure

The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the model developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The model CHP applies to all local authorities and all local authority services, including Social Work which implemented the CHP on 1 April 2017.

The Council's CHP is based on a two-stage process. The first stage is frontline resolution and the second is investigation.

Frontline resolution is for issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation. This means 'on the spot' apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint within five working days or less. Complaints are addressed by staff or referred to the appropriate point for resolution. Complaint details, outcome and action taken are recorded and used for service improvement.

Stage Two investigations are for issues that have not been resolved at the first stage or that are complex, serious or 'high risk'. This means a response is provided within 20 working days following an investigation of the points raised.

Following investigation, if customers are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with their complaint, they can ask the SPSO to look at it. The SPSO cannot normally look at a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure first.

This report provides information on complaints handling within the Council during 2018/19. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO and includes benchmarking information, drawn from past exercises carried out by the Improvement Service and Audit Scotland.

Each Service has a nominated lead officer for complaints and a complaint officers' Working Group is in place. At a national level, a Local Authority Complaint Handlers network has been established for a few years now in conjunction with the SPSO and a Knowledge Hub forum is also established so that Councils can share good practice and common queries. Falkirk Council is part of this group which meets on a quarterly basis.

Complaints Indicators

The SPSO has set eight indicators for complaints performance. These cover:

- 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

The Council's performance against these indicators for 2018/19 is set out with comparative information for 2017/18.

The Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network is currently collating all performance information across the 32 local authorities. This benchmarking information will be included in next year's report.

Indicator One

Complaints Received Per 1,000 Population

The population of the Council area is 160,130.

2018/19	2017/18
Complaints received - 3670	Complaints received - 2832
Complaints per 1000 - 22.9	Complaints per 1000 - 17.7

Indicator Two

Closed Complaints

	2018/19	%	2017/18	%
Total complaints closed	3660	100%	2817	100
Total complaints closed at stage 1	3310	90%	2600	92.3%
Total complaints closed at stage 2	62	2%	35	1.24%
Total complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	288	8%	182	6.46%

Indicator Three

Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld & Not Upheld

Stage One Complaints

	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	3310	2600
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1	999	782
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	30%	30%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1	685	368
Number of complaints partially upheld as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	21%	14%
% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 1	51%	44%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1	1626	1450
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	49%	56%

Stage Two Complaints

	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	35
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2	7	3
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	11.29%	9%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2	17	12
Number of complaints partially upheld as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	27.42%	34%
% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 2	39%	43%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2	38	20
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	61.29%	57%

Escalated Complaints

	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed after escalation	288	182
Number of complaints upheld after escalation	47	37
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	16%	20%
Number of complaints partially upheld after escalation	84	43
The number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	29%	24%
Number of complaints not upheld after escalation	157	102
The number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	55%	56%

Indicator Four

Average Response Times

Stage 1	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	3310	2600
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 1	5 (target 5)	6 (target 5)
Stage 2		
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	35
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 2	21 (target = 20)	24 (target = 20)
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	288	182
Average time in working days for a full response after escalation	16 (target = 20)	16 (target = 20)

Indicator Five

Performance Against Timescales

Stage 1	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	3310	2600
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within 5 working days	2872	2317
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within 5 working days as a % of total stage 1 complaints	87%	89%
Stage 2		
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	35
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days	36	24
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a % of total stage 2 complaints	58%	69%
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	288	182
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days	247	152
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days as a % of total escalated complaints	86%	84%

Indicator Six

Use of Extensions

Stage One	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	3310	2600
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised	102	186
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 1 complaints	3%	7%

Stage Two	2018/19	2017/18
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	35
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised	11	8
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 2 complaints	18%	23%
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	288	182
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised	7	17
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints escalated	2%	9.3%

Indicator Seven

Customer Satisfaction

In last year's annual report, we reported the results of a survey we ran between April and May 2018 asking our Citizens Panel how satisfied they were with how the Council deals with complaints. We are aware further consultation is needed and the complaint officers' working group is looking at options which include surveying all customers at the end of the complaints process for their views. This means an annual evaluation could be carried out and improvement made where needed.

Work has also started on refreshing the current Citizens Panel. Promotional activity will start in the next few months to encourage greater resident participation.

Indicator Eight

Learning from Complaints

The SPSO is clear that Councils should have processes in place to help them learn from complaints and review and change service delivery if required. This section outlines areas where service provision has been reviewed and improved in response to complaints. To help identify cross-cutting issues, the complaints working group is identifying themes against which complaints will be recorded eg service failure, information failure, and attitude of staff. This will allow recurring issues to be addressed on a Council-wide basis with further guidance and training provided if required.

The areas of service which generated the highest volume of complaints over the year were household waste collection, repairs, staff conduct and Council Tax.



Children's Services

This year we have delivered a number of additional training sessions to school-based staff to make sure new employees fully understand our complaints procedure and are confident in using the Customer First reporting system.

The addition of two new fields to this system, 'themes' and 'what has been learned', has continued our focus on learning from complaints. Complaints cover a variety of themes but of particular note are two complaints covering service delivery and communication. The communication example relates to a complaint about the misuse of social media by school pupils. The school learnt that parents needed to be more informed on the scope of what the school can and can't do and what is within their control to monitor and change. The school discovered that this had not been communicated clearly to parents before.

Another complaint to do with service delivery was upheld in relation to school transport and the timing of taxis to and from school. The findings resulted in the school and ASN team recommending transport arrangements be retendered in order to meet pupils' statutory entitlement to education. The school also offered to support the family with transport whilst awaiting the outcome of the retendering process.

Social Work Adult Services & Children & Families and Criminal Justice

The Workforce Development Team for Social Work is looking at an SQA accredited course called Promoting Positive Behaviours. Increased staff awareness of how to promote positive behaviour in challenging situations could prevent complaints occurring or escalating, in some circumstances. This training could also provide a common approach to managing challenging behaviour across all services and roles.

Corporate & Housing Services

Next Generation Contact Centre

In the past year, the £120k state-of-the-art telephony system has received over one million calls and single-handedly eliminated the engaged tone previously heard by over 60k people each month.

By reducing the number of helplines from 50 to one, the system offers callers an easy way to self-serve, with 30% of calls received directed to the right services without coming via the Contact Centre.

During this time, of the calls received, 80% have been answered within 120 seconds while calls to MECS system are now answered within seven seconds, beating industry standards.

Housing Services

Staff across Housing and Property now come together to review more complex complaints, discussing potential solutions and areas for improvement. This involves complaints that have been upheld or more difficult ones involving a variety of cross Service teams.

Following a successful trial period, all staff within the maintenance section at BMD now have access to mobile technology. All work is scheduled for trade staff resulting in better communication and repairs completion rates enhances customer satisfaction.

Revenues & Benefits

We are continuing to reduce the number of complaints we receive in the pursuit of rent and Council Tax. By engaging early by text message and email, tailoring our services to suit customer needs and preferences, we are communicating more effectively and efficiently and are able to provide more flexibility around payment options.

As well as working closer with our colleagues in Housing Services, the Welfare Benefits & Debt Advice team joined us in April 2019. This partnership has achieved greater integration of support to those customers who can benefit from this specialist advice and gives us the chance to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity.

We are continuing to develop our online forms and have introduced some automation to speed up outcomes for customers with more to follow. Complaints are monitored weekly by senior managers to make sure prompt responses are given and any live issues identified.

Development Services

Further to a review of a complaint made at the end of last year relating to disability access, all Roads staff have been advised to consider individual personal circumstances further in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and our Public Sector Equality Duty. This involves staff meeting any individual or party that has indicated that they require disability access to make sure that needs are fully met and that the service provided is consistent across the Council area.



Complaints Considered by the SPSO

During 2018/19 22 new complaints were notified to the Council by the SPSO. These are broken down by Service area in the table opposite.

Corporate & Housing Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2018/19	2017/18	Difference
9	23	-14

Development Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2018/19	2017/18	Difference
6	14	-8

Children's Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2018/19	2017/18	Difference
7	12	-5

Social Work Adult Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2018/19	2017/18	Difference
0	0	0

Total		
Number of new complaints received		
2018/19	2017/18	Difference
22	49	-27