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Glasgow City Council

Operational Performance and Delivery Scrutiny Committee

Report by Head of Communication and Strategic Partnerships

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COMPLAINTS HANDLING PERFORMANCE 2019 - 20**Purpose of Report:**

To advise elected members of the council family's performance in complaints handling for the year April 1 2019 – 31 March 2020. This report covers all Glasgow family complaints handling, with the exception of Social Work complaints, which are covered in a separate report to this committee.

A summary slide containing the key information in bulleted point format is also provided.

Recommendations:

Note: members are asked to note the report.

Ward No(s):

Citywide: ✓

Local member(s) advised: Yes No

consulted: Yes No

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1. Executive Summary

- a. This report covers the Glasgow family of organisations' complaints handling performance for the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. Since April 2013 all Scottish councils have been required to monitor and report their performance on handling complaints under their Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) against a suite of high level performance indicators to meet the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) statutory requirements.
- b. All core GCC service departments and ALEOs use the model Complaints Handling Procedure, introduced in the Glasgow family of organisations in June 2013. This consists of three stages: frontline resolution (stage 1); investigation stage (stage 2) and external review (stage 3), where a referral is made to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), either by the complainant or the authority. Social Work Services began using the model CHP in April 2017 (with minor differences), replacing statutory procedures that had existed previously. SWS complaints data is covered in a separate report to this committee.
- c. Compliance with the model CHP is a statutory requirement. The relevant legislation is contained in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002.
- d. There are a number of different outcomes to formal complaints: upheld; partially upheld; not upheld; withdrawn or transferred to another process. The majority of complaints received by the Glasgow family continue to be upheld or partially upheld, either at Stage 1 or 2.
- e. Complaints can be dealt with either at the frontline resolution stage, or the investigation stage. Most complaints (92%) are dealt with at the frontline stage.
- f. Frontline stage resolution is generally applied where the complaint is reasonably straightforward and involves a one-off or limited service failure, such as a missed refuse collection, or about the cleanliness of a council building. The Service Level Agreement for a frontline complaint resolution is five working days.
- g. Staff are encouraged to try to resolve a customer complaint at the time it is made.
- h. Where a complaint is upheld in whole or part, a suitable apology can be made to the customer and actions taken, wherever possible, to address their concerns and/or improve service provision.
- i. Where complaints identify issues of persistent service failure, these should be addressed by senior management teams in the relevant Service. Analysis of complaints data should be carried out regularly by Service senior managers and embedded in change and improvement processes.
- j. Investigation stage complaints are more complex and can generally be categorised as maladministration, or persistent service failure. Complaints handlers can immediately move a complaint received to the investigation stage where they consider it will not be possible to investigate or resolve within five working days (due to its complexity). Customers who have had their complaint dealt with at the frontline stage are offered the option to have it considered at stage 2, if they are dissatisfied with the frontline response. Complaints considered at stage 2 (after a referral from stage 1) should be investigated by more senior

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staff not connected to the initial complaint to ensure objectivity. The SLA for investigation stage is 20 working days and will always be concluded with a formal, written response to the complainant, advising of the outcome and signposting the complainant to the SPSO.

- k. Extensions to the above timescales for responses may be granted – for example, where the case has a degree of complexity or seriousness that does not allow for a response within SLA, or where staff absence will impact on response times. We always try to agree extensions with the customer. Requests by complainants to move a complaint immediately to stage 2 are at the discretion of the council. This is to help avoid relatively trivial matters being considered at Stage 2, and also to provide a timeous response to the customer.
- l. At the conclusion of stage 2, customers are referred to the SPSO, should they remain unhappy. The SPSO may decide to investigate the complaint and this is considered the third, and final, stage of the complaint's journey. Once a complaint has exhausted the council's CHP, dialogue with the complainant should cease pending the SPSO investigation to avoid prejudicing the outcome. Where the SPSO makes a decision on a complaint, it cannot be investigated again by the council.
- m. Very few complaints referred to the SPSO about the Glasgow family are formally investigated by the Ombudsman. In the year 2019 – 20, there were 117 complaints/inquiries made by customers to the SPSO but only 4 of these were formally investigated with all either upheld or partially upheld. The SPSO cannot, by law, look at a complaint until it has exhausted the authority's formal CHP and the majority of complaints it received about the Glasgow family were deemed 'premature' as they had not been through this process.
- n. A significant number (30) of the complaints were not investigated by the SPSO on the grounds of proportionality. This is where the Ombudsman has adjudged that nothing further can be achieved for the customer beyond the outcome at stage 2.
- o. Where a complaint is referred to, and investigated, by the SPSO, the following outcomes are possible: upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Upheld, or partially upheld, complaints usually come with recommendations for the authority, or redress measures for the customer, although these are seldom financial.
- p. Complaints can be made in a variety of ways: in person, by telephone, using a paper form or increasingly, online using a bespoke complaints form. More than 65 per cent of complaints are now made online, via the council's website. Making a complaint online has advantages both for the customer and the council: for the customer it means the complaint is expressed in their own words and can be entered on a 24/7 basis and for the council it saves time processing the complaint. While complaints made via social media channels are noted by the digital teams, customers are always signposted to the online complaints procedure, should they wish their complaint to be progressed formally. This process is embedded in the revised CHP. Complaints made on social media are not recorded in council systems due to the difficulties of tracking such complaints and also for resource reasons.
- q. Contingency arrangements have been put in place to manage complaints during the pandemic. The council website makes it clear there may be some delays to

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responses as a result of staff being deployed to other frontline activities, or absent.

- r. Complaints are recorded, tracked and managed in an IT system called Lagan. This system was due to be retired during 2019 and replaced by a solution called Firmstep (now Granicus GovService) which will offer significantly improved case management facilities and self-service options, leading to a reduction in manual interventions during the process of managing a complaint. However, the introduction of Firmstep/Granicus GovService is a part of the Digital Citizen programme of work which is currently being re-baselined by GCC and CGI. Part of the re-baseline work is determining whether Granicus can provide an effective system for complaint management. Detailed requirements for the management of complaints have been provided to CGI and they are expect to present the proposed solution to the Digital Citizen Programme Board by March 2021. Social Work complaints will continue to be recorded in another legacy system called C4 until the introduction of a integrated information system. C4 is also used for council family 'comments and compliments.'
- s. The present system of how complaints are categorised has been recognised as unsatisfactory and lacking qualitative management information to help generate service improvements. A new, streamlined system of categorisation was due to be introduced during 2019 to allow for improved reporting, consistency, benchmarking and better management information. This is being done in conjunction with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network, of which GCC is a member, and the SPSO. This work stream is currently in progress and was intended to be introduced during 2020 but has been delayed.
- t. There is occasional variance in the way complaints are recorded across the council family. Where this is persistent, matters will be addressed via the council's complaint handler's network, the Customer Engagement Forum, which meets quarterly. Better categorisation of complaints will assist with this process, leading to improved management information on which to base decision making.
- u. There is a considerable onus on a complaints handler to recognise at which stage the complaint should be handled. Some complaints are categorised as being fit for stage 1 when they should immediately be moved to stage 2 as it is apparent a resolution/response cannot be provided within the stage 1 SLA due to the complexities of the case. This has an adverse effect on the overall SLA response rate at stage 1.
- v. At the present time, it is not generally possible to quantify the amount of time spent by officers on dealing with complaints. Some complaints are straightforward and will involve little resource to resolve, while others will take much longer to resolve and potentially involve a larger group of officers. A small number of complainants can take up a disproportionate amount of officer resource, potentially to the disadvantage of the broader customer base. Where complainants persistently refuse to accept the council's explanation or decision on a matter, this may be managed via its Unacceptable Actions Policy (UAP) which aims to effectively manage the contact of vexatious customers, or those whose actions we consider unacceptable. Customers placed under some form of UAP restriction will always be given at least one point of contact within the council for the period of the restriction.

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- w. Responsibility for complaints handling is operationally managed by the corporate Customer Care Team (within CBS) for the core council and by complaints handlers/managers within the specific ALEOs. Strategic responsibility for complaints reporting, compliance and governance resides with the Chief Executive's Department.

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2. The general trends and issues in 2019 – 20 for complaints handling can be summarised as follows:

- a. The overall number of complaints received increased slightly for the first time in four years.
- b. The proportion of complaints upheld or partially upheld has remained relatively stable.
- c. There is a significant shortfall in performance in terms of meeting timescales for responses, at stage 1. The average time to resolve a Stage 1 complaint during 2019 – 20 was 19 days (the SLA is five working days). It should be noted, however, that complaints not recorded as closed within five working days may well have been dealt with even though they have not been formally closed in the IT system. The onus to formally close complaints can often be on officers performing frontline service delivery, who may have competing priorities.
- d. Performance at Stage 2 is 26 working days on average for complaints to be closed. This is above the national performance target of 20 days.
- e. The majority of complaints received are recorded against Neighbourhoods and Sustainability and Glasgow Life.
- f. More than 400 Service Improvements were identified as a result of complaints received. The majority of these were by Glasgow Life. GL publicises the outcomes of complaints in the venue where they were received using a 'you said, we did' method of presentation on reception area notice boards.
- g. Complaints performance is reported to Service/ALEO senior management teams on a regular basis. Cases investigated by the SPSO are brought to the attention of senior officials in the relevant service and to the Chief Executive.

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3. Complaints statistical data 2019 – 20

This year has seen a small increase of six per cent in the number of complaints received about services provided by the Glasgow family of organisations. This is the first increase in the overall volume of complaints since 2015-16.

Complaints received

Period	Total complaints received	Stage 1 (frontline) Complaints	Stage 2 (investigation) Complaints	Change from previous year
2019 - 20	9,850	9,437	413	+570
2018 - 19	9,280	8,840	479	-1,808
2017 - 18	11,088	10,057	1,031	-2,044
2016 - 17	13,092	11,737	1,355	-4,220
2015 - 16	17,312	15,764	1,544	+3,662
2014 - 15	13,650	12,139	1,511	+3,526
2013 - 14	10,124*	9,452	672	N/A

(Note: * only partial data available for year 2013 – 14 due to introduction of new Complaints Handling Procedure during that period.)

Outcomes of complaints closed at all stages	
Upheld complaints	37%
Partially upheld complaints	36%
Not Upheld complaints	24%
Withdrawn or transferred to another process	3%

Average time taken to resolve complaints	Glasgow family	National performance target
Stage 1 (frontline)	19 days	5 days
Stage 2 (investigation)	26 days	20 days

Service Improvements made as a result of complaints	
Financial Services	5
City Parking	1
Neighbourhoods and Sustainability	16
Glasgow Life	401

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4. SPSO statistics

	Glasgow family
Total cases investigated/determined by SPSO 2019 - 20	4
Upheld or partially upheld	4
Uphold rate (previous year)	100% (50%)
Percentage change from 2016 – 17	+50%

There were 117 inquiries received by the SPSO about Glasgow City Council during the year. Thirty of these complaints did not proceed to an investigation on the grounds of proportionality, as determined by the Ombudsman.

5. Complaints recorded against each Service or ALEO 2019 –20.

Service/ALEO	Frontline (Stage 1)	Investigation (Stage 2)
Chief Executive	40	7
City Building	60	0
City Parking	117	23
City Property	5	2
Development and Regeneration Services	82	8
Education Services	243	123
Financial Services	887	33
Glasgow Life	1942	67
Neighbourhoods and Sustainability	6060	150

6. Categories of complaints recorded against each Service/ALEO (top 3, where available):

Service/ALEO	1	2	3
Chief Executive	No specific category selected	Procedures	Public processions
City Building	No specific category selected		
City Parking	Service level	Policy	No specific category selected
City Property	Policy	Health and safety	Service provided
Development and	Customer service	No specific category selected	Process

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Regeneration Services			
Education Services	Process	Policy	Pupil behaviour
Financial Services	Procedures	Waiting time (phone)	No specific category selected
Glasgow Life	Venue appearance and maintenance	Staff attitude	Programming
Neighbourhoods and Sustainability	No specific category selected	Missed collection	Procedures

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Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial: None

Legal: Compliance with the Complaints Handling Procedure is a statutory requirement. The relevant legislation is contained in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002.

Personnel: None

Procurement: None

Council Strategic Plan:

Good complaint management, clear and detailed reporting and service improvements learned as a result of complaints within the council generally support its core values of transparency, upholding citizen's rights and partnership working with citizens by allowing contributions to be made from any source on the subject of how service delivery might be improved.

The complaints handling process supports the following specific themes:

Resilient and Empowered Neighbourhoods, with specific outcomes:

- Citizens and neighbourhoods can influence how services are developed and budgets spent

Priorities: 77, 83

A well-governed city that listens and responds, with specific outcomes:

- Improve the council's communication with residents, including through updating our website, facilitating engagement on social media and by webcasting council committee meetings.

Priority: 105

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Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2017-22

This process supports Equality Outcome 8 - Service users with protected characteristics are provided with targeted, improved and more accessible information about the services provided by the Council Family.

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

Not required as this is not a new/updated strategy, policy or service and has no significant equality impact. However, the overarching complaints process commits to making reasonable adjustments to support individuals with protected characteristics ensuring that it is accessible for all.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio economic disadvantage.

Not required as this is not a new/updated strategy, policy or service and has no significant equality impact

Sustainability Impacts:

Environmental: None

Social, including Article 19 opportunities: None

Economic: None

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

Customer complaints' data is stored in a secure case management system, Lagan.

3 Recommendations

The Operational Performance and Delivery Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of this report.