



**Shetland
Islands
Council**

Complaints Monitoring Report

2015-16



1. INTRODUCTION



I am delighted to be able to present our complaints monitoring report for the financial year 2015-16. Unfortunately we have not progressed with complaints in the way that I would have liked.

This has been subject to consideration by Corporate Management team and a steering group was given the task in October 2016 of driving forward the necessary cultural changes as we now have a system that has the capability to record complaints appropriately. Progress was reported in February 2017 and Complaints is now a specific workstream within the Council's Business Transformation Programme 2016-20 as we continue to strive to put the customer first.

It can be easy to view complaints in a negative light. However, I take the view that effective monitoring of the messages provided through a complaints handling process is an absolutely essential way for a modern organisation to learn and improve the way it works. It is extremely important for a public service provider like the Council to be mindful, at all times, of the feedback our service users provide.

The challenge for us as a Council going forward is to encourage our staff to embrace the positives from effective complaints handling. We must ensure that our monitoring processes examine the reasons behind complaints and, wherever possible, avoid these arising again. We must also seek to understand and share good practice so it can be repeated.

We have a long journey ahead of us to achieve a positive complaints culture but I am determined that we will get there.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Boden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chief Executive, Mark Boden

2. AN OVERVIEW OF 2015-16

Shetland Islands Council adopted the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) model complaints handling procedure in October 2012. However, the systems and processes to accompany the new procedure were not fully embedded and therefore full implementation has been challenging.

A project was carried out during the latter part of 2013 to invest in new complaints management software. For the first time that software gave us the mechanism to deliver a more consistent approach to the logging, monitoring and reporting of complaints across the Council.

The new system went live on 1 April 2014. There has continued to be challenges in embedding this system. It is acknowledged that the information held on 2015-16 complaints handling, in some services, continues to lack essential detail to allow us to report fully against all of the national indicators.

The Council's Corporate Management Team have recognized that complaints handling remains challenging council wide and a Steering Group has been set up to encourage all services to engage positively in the handling of complaints. The first meeting of this group was in October 2016 and a further report was presented to CMT in February 2017. Complaints is now a work stream in the Councils' Business Transformation Programme 2016-20.

From the data that is available, it is clear that many areas prioritise complaints effectively and seek to abide by the principles outlined in the model procedure. We acknowledge there is room for improvement.

An important part of handling complaints effectively is to take time to develop a better understanding of the information they tell us. As a Council we should be committed to:

- **Identify service failures and take appropriate action**
- **Identify where services need to improve**
- **Identify poor complaints handling practice and put it right**
- **Examine good practice and understand how we might repeat it in other areas**
- **Identify trends in complaints and proactively address any issues**

The above components are key to a successful complaints process and will be at the forefront of the work that will be undertaken as part of the Business Transformation Programme

The remainder of this report will seek to provide information on the eight national indicator areas. These are:

Complaints received per 1,000 of population
Closed complaints
Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
Average times
Performance against timescales
Number of cases where an extension is authorized
Customer satisfaction
Learning from complaints

Indicator 1 – Complaints received per 1,000 population

According to the National Records Office for Scotland, the population of Shetland during 2015-16 was **23,230**.¹

During that time, we handled **131** complaints from members of the public.

This means that, on average, **5.6** complaints were received per 1,000 residents in Shetland.

COMMENT:

This represents an increase in the number of complaints recorded, using the system available across the Council, since our previous published annual report. We believe that this demonstrates an increased awareness of the need to record complaints centrally.

However, we are also of the opinion that the number of complaints will continue to increase as this awareness is cascaded throughout the Council.

Our work to date has identified areas in the Council where complaints were either not being recorded on the Covalent recording system e.g Care homes and also areas e.g. Housing where complaints are being recorded but not on the approved system or with all the information required by the SPSO.

These issues are being resolved as they are identified with information cascaded and uploads undertaken to ensure more accurate recording and therefore accurate information being provided to the SPSO.

¹ Source: National Records of Scotland -

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/population-estimates/mid-15-cor-12-13-14/mype-2015-corrections-for-12-13-14-correctedb.pdf>

Indicator 2 – Closed complaints

105 complaints were closed at Stage One. This represents **78.4%** of all complaints closed.

29 complaints were closed at Stage Two. This represents **21.6%** of all complaints closed.

Stage 1 Complaints are issues that are straightforward and easily resolved requiring little or no investigation

Stage 2 complaints are issues that have not been resolved at the frontline or that are complex, serious or high risk.

It is not always appropriate to handle complaints at the first stage of the process. It may be the case that the issue is of such importance that it needs to be handled at the second stage.

COMMENT:

From the information available it would appear that we are dealing with Stage 1 complaints more often within timescales than we were previously.



Case Study 1 Learning from complaints

The Cleansing Service received a complaint from a member of the public who had slipped on a pavement in a street in central Ierwick.



The matter was investigated and the cause was identified as the pavements become slippery if not cleaned regularly.

The street cleaning team have now added this area to their weekly clean.

These fairly straightforward and easily achievable change measures results in fewer complaints and contributes towards keeping the public safe.

Case Study 2 Learning from complaints

A parent complained to school management about an alleged incident of bullying of their child who has additional needs.

They were subsequently dissatisfied with how the school handled their complaint in respect of how well it had been investigated.

As a result a thorough investigation was undertaken by a central officer, and elements of the complaint were then upheld.

These areas led to further training for specific staff in the school on our anti-bullying policy, and it highlighted the need for the policy to be reviewed.

Indicator 3 – Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld

Outcome of Stage One complaints, detailed information is available for.

36 complaints **upheld** at Stage One

50 complaints **not upheld** at Stage One

19 complaints **partially upheld** at Stage One

Outcome of Stage Two complaints, detailed information is available for.

3 complaints **upheld** at Stage Two

21 complaints **not upheld** at Stage Two

5 complaints **partially upheld** at Stage Two

COMMENT:

Where a complaint is not upheld, it is vital to ensure the complainant receives a clear explanation of why that is the case. The reasons for not upholding complaints vary greatly across services, here are some examples.

- Contractors timescales outwith our control.
- Incorrect information disclosed by the complainant at time of meeting
- Customer dissatisfaction with council policy
- Customer remains unhappy with the decision made after a full investigation

Indicator 4 – Average times

Stage One complaints

We aim to respond to and close Stage One complaints within 5 working days. The average time to respond to complaints at Stage One was **22.6** working days.

Stage Two complaints

We aim to respond to and close Stage Two complaints within 20 working days. The average time to respond to complaints at Stage Two was **25.7** working days.

Escalated complaints (where a customer was not satisfied with the handling of their complaint at stage 1)

The average time in working days for a full response to complaints after escalation was 54.5 days.

COMMENT:

There were 35 complaints which took more than 20 days to resolve. 6 of these cases took more than 100 days to resolve. In a small number of cases, part of the delay is due to the difficulties in obtaining the information required in order to investigate the issue, for example where the customer or other person(s) involved have left Shetland and / or employment by the Council

Directors are now provided with details of all complaints in their Directorate on a monthly basis so that they can follow up on any delay. Where complaints are recorded on Covalentn the system can provide reports that show when a complaint is nearing the deadline for a response



Indicator 5 – Performance against targets

42 complaints were **closed** at Stage One within 5 working days (40%)

4 complaints were **closed** at Stage Two within 20 working days (14%)

COMMENT:

This indicator measures the number and proportion of complaints that were closed at Stage One within 5 working days, and those that were closed at Stage Two within 20 working days. The introduction of the system to electronically record complaints now enables us to submit these figures.

We are looking at ways to increase the proportion of complaints dealt with within the targets set. Regular reports on complaints are now submitted to Directors and Departments report information about complaints quarterly to the Council's Committees as part of the Planning & Performance Management Framework (PPMF).

Indicator 6 – Number of cases where an extension was authorised

2 complaints were **closed** at Stage One where an extension was granted.

9 complaints were **closed** at Stage Two where an extension was granted.

COMMENT:

This indicator measures the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline was authorised. Again this statistic is being reported for the first time.

Senior Managers have the authority to grant extensions up to 5 days for stage 1 complaints as long as the customer is advised.

For Stage 2 extensions can also be granted as long as the customer agrees.

Extensions can be required for many reasons such as a staff member on annual leave or an extended period of time required to ascertain the full facts.

Improvements to the current process will be looked at as part of the ongoing review in order to provide more information in this regard to allow us to review whether or not the the need for extensions is always justified by the circumstances. E.g. detail of reasons for extension could be added to system notes.



Indicator 7 – Customer satisfaction

We have many methods for collecting feedback on our service delivery. As well as collecting negative comments, it is important that notes of thanks and compliments are also logged. Local Government Benchmarking Framework figures show that all our services assessed had satisfaction levels significantly higher than the national averages. These are shown below:

- Local schools: 86% (Scotland 79%) ***Above national average***
- Social Work/Social Care: 64% (Scotland 51%) ***Above national average***
- Refuse collection: 93% (Scotland 84%) ***Above national average***
- Street cleanliness: 75% (Scotland 74%) ***Above national average***
- Local libraries: 92% (Scotland 77%) ***Above national average***
- Local parks and open spaces: 94% (Scotland 86%) ***Above national average***
- Local museums and galleries: 96% (Scotland 75%) ***Above national average***
- Local leisure facilities: 94% (Scotland 76%) ***Above national average***

Indicator 8 – Learning from complaints

COMMENT:

One of the most important aspects of the Complaints Handling Process is that we learn from the complaints we have received from the public.

The organisation needs to encourage our staff that complaints are a positive way to gather valuable customer insight, and allows the identification of failures so we can then learn from those to make things right.

Enhanced staff confidence in dealing with complaints will help develop consistency and efficiency across all services.

This will be a key focus of the Business Transformation Programme strand..

The Corporate Management Team Directors receive a monthly complaints monitoring report which should contribute to the learning process.

Complaints are reported by Directors to elected members on a quarterly basis as part of the Performance Reporting cycle.

3. LOOKING AHEAD

The key challenges we face are doubtless shared with many other councils and organisations in general. These are to:

- Embed an organisational culture that seeks to ensure effective delivery of the principles outlined in the Shetland Islands Council Complaints Handling Procedure.
- Empower staff to have the confidence to seek early resolution of complaints.
- Ensure officers handling complaints - particularly more complicated matters - apply the necessary priority and always seek to ensure the timescales are met.
- Improve communication with complainants; always ensuring that, where it is not possible to meet timescales, an explanation is provided.
- Promote a more systematic approach to recording complaints, to ensure that future reporting against the national indicators is seamless.
- Identify and cascade instances of best practice across the Council having a particular focus on lessons learned.
- Improve our trend analysis to help identify learning points and potential local hotspots.
- Align monitoring activity with our performance management arrangements, particularly our public performance reporting arrangements.



FURTHER INFO

The Annual report from the Chief Social Work Officer 2015-16 is available here:

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/coins/submissiondocuments.asp?submissionid=20030>

If you want to leave feedback on Council services, you can do that here:

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/feedback/default.asp>

You can find our quarterly monitoring reports here:

http://www.shetland.gov.uk/comments_complaints/default.asp

www.shetland.gov.uk



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