

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Audit, Risk and Scrutiny
DATE	28 th April 2016
DIRECTOR	Richard Ellis (interim)
TITLE OF REPORT	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Complaint Recommendations
REPORT NUMBER	CG/16/055
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides details of all Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) decisions made during 2015/16 Q4 relating to Aberdeen City Council complaints.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee notes the details of the report, identifies any systemic issues and recommends any additional actions as appropriate.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

N/A

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The Scottish Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) has three stages:

- Stage 1 - Frontline Resolution
- Stage 2 - Formal Investigation
- Stage 3 - Independent External Review (SPSO)

The first two stages of the complaints handling process are dealt with internally by the council. The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the council's complaints

procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failures and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way the council has handled the complaint.

The ombudsman has the authority to make a final decision on the complaint. Following their investigation, the SPSO write to the council and the complainant with the outcome of their decision. Where necessary the SPSO will make recommendations that the council must implement to address a customer's dissatisfaction and / or to prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. The SPSO also instruct the timescales for implementing their recommendations.

During 2015/16 Q4, the SPSO made 2 decisions relating to Aberdeen City Council complaints that were referred to the Ombudsman for consideration. 1 complaint was upheld and 1 complaint was partially upheld.

Details of the complaints and any subsequent recommendations are provided in Appendix A. All recommendations have been implemented by Aberdeen City Council within the timescales required by the SPSO.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

Complaints are a valuable source of information about council services, which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. It is important to take action to try to stop the problem from happening to any customers again. Lessons can be learnt from identifying common and recurring causes of complaints but another important approach is to identify lessons that can be learnt from individual complaints.

As part of the complaints handling procedure, services should identify learning points so that they can be recorded and acted upon to improve the customer experience. Where appropriate, actions should be implemented across the Council, and not just in the service area that was the subject of the individual complaints. Complaints information can also be reviewed to improve service delivery for customers in the future. All SPSO decisions are therefore shared with the appropriate service(s).

Improving Staff Experience –

The outcomes of complaint decisions are fed back to relevant staff. This includes both upheld and not upheld decisions to engage staff in complaints handling and ensure they are fully informed of outcomes.

Complaint information is also used to inform changes in working practices and training provision for staff to improve their experience as well as that of the customer. SPSO recommendations relating to complaints handling are fed back to the responding officers to help develop the key skills required for good complaints handling.

Improving our use of Resources –

The organisation should look to solve the core issue which led to the complaint and learn from the outcome of complaints so to reduce the potential for more / similar complaints. This should lead to a reduction in repeat complaints and complaints investigation and handling time which can be a lengthy process for those involved.

Corporate -

This recommendation supports the Shaping Aberdeen 'triple aim' triangle in terms of improving the staff experience, improving the customer experience and improving the use of resources in delivering outcomes.

This requirement to share learning from complaints supports the Single Outcome Agreement; providing joined up working across the organisation that will provide overall, an excellent customer experience.

It supports the smarter priorities of 'Smarter Governance – Participation'. Specifically;

"Smarter Governance – Participation: acknowledging the role that citizens can play in the evolution of the city.

Priority: we will encourage citizens to participate in the development, design and decision making of services to promote, civic pride, active citizenship and resilience.

Outcome: Citizens feel they can influence their communities through engagement in the development, design and decision making of services."

Senior management should review the information gathered from complaints regularly and lessons learnt from complaints should be fed back into individual service improvement plans.

Public –

N/A

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

No risks have been identified in this report.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Appendix A

Complaint Received Date	SPSO Decision Date	Complaints Investigated by the SPSO	Directorate	Decision	SPSO Recommendations	Completion Date
23 December 2013	1 February 2016	1. The Head of the school did not deal with the issue raised in December 2012 as they said they would (<i>not upheld</i>); 2. The Council did not reasonably investigate the complaints raised by the pupil and parents; (<i>upheld</i>) 3. The Council did not communicate reasonably with the parents regarding the investigation of their complaints. (<i>upheld</i>)	Education and Children's Services	Partially Upheld	1. Demonstrate to the SPSO that education and schools staff have been made aware of the new guidance and processes for complaints; 2. Take steps to ensure that complaints handling staff routinely consider which policies may be relevant to the complaint 3. Write to the complainants to clarify what action was taken in response to the upheld parts of the Stage 2 complaint 4. Apologise to complainants for the overall failings found in the SPSO investigation.	24 February 2016
21 July 2015	9 March 2016	The Council unreasonably failed to explain the rationale behind the offer of compensation for the loss of the complainant's late father's personal effects.	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure	Upheld	Apologise to the complainant and their sibling for the additional distress and inconvenience caused by the delay in explaining the rationale behind the compensation offer.	28 March 2016