

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director Corporate Services

Audit and PR Committee: 11 December 2013

Subject: Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman Complaints Report 2012/13

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to present the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO) report 2012/13 on complaints handling by West Dunbartonshire Council.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee notes the content of the report.

3. Background

- 3.1** From 1 April 2013, West Dunbartonshire Council adopted the SPSO complaint handling policy. It impacts on all Council services with the exception of Community Health & Care Partnership, where the SPSO is reviewing Social Work complaint management on a national basis. In addition statutory appeals and reviews, such as education appeals on exam results are directed to the relevant decision making body and not processed through the SPSO office.
- 3.2** Complaints are now progressed through a two stage process with a centralised point of contact to provide early and local resolution. Complaint Management is founded on a culture that welcomes and values complaints, providing valuable information that can be used to improve processes, service planning and customer satisfaction.
- 3.3** Stage 1 is a front line resolution stage and should be resolved within 5 days. Stage 2 allows for complex complaints that require further investigation and these should be resolved within 20 days. At this point, the customer can access the services of the SPSO should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. SPSO is committed to providing annual reports for each Scottish local authority.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The SPSO provides an annual overview for each local authority of complaints reported to its office. Appendix 1 shows a breakdown of complaints received by the SPSO regarding West Dunbartonshire Council. Appendix 2 is a summary breakdown of complaints received by West Dunbartonshire Council in 2012/13.

- 4.2** The SPSO received 33 complaints regarding West Dunbartonshire Council in 2012/13. Of the 33 complaints, 18 were deemed as premature, terminology used by the SPSO when the complaint has not exhausted the Council's process. Of the remaining SPSO complaints, 1 complaint reached the investigation stage to be partially upheld and 1 complaint was not upheld. All other complaints were considered to be matters out with the jurisdiction of the SPSO or closed as no outcome was achievable for the customer or the Council. The largest reason for West Dunbartonshire customers contacting the SPSO was in relation to Housing matters.
- 4.3** As outlined in Appendix 2, the Council handled 413 complaints in 2012/13. Over half of the total number of complaints received were resolved within 5 days. The preferred method for customers to contact us with a complaint is by telephone and email.
- 5. People Implications**
- 5.1** There are no people implications arising from this report.
- 6. Financial Implications**
- 6.1** There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 7. Risk Analysis**
- 7.1** There is a reputational risk of not responding to complaints within defined time periods within the new two stage process. Escalation to SPSO and thereafter Audit Scotland would be the customer's next stage of complaint if we fail to deliver on the timescales for responding to complaints.
- 8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**
- 8.1** The new two stage process has been equality impact assessed at a National level. Locally, all aspects have been considered and assistance to navigate the complaints process is available for all customers.
- 9. Consultation**
- 9.1** Not applicable to this report.
- 10. Strategic Assessment**
- 10.1** Effective complaints handling contributes to all five Council strategic priorities.

Electronic Signature (see notes)

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - SPSO Data
Appendix 2 - Summary of Council Complaints 2012/13

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All Wards