

Scrutiny Committee

30 November 2016

School Complaints – Academic Year 2015-2016

Report by Director (Education and Children's Services)

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents to the Committee the school complaints information for the Academic Year 2015-2016.

1. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 The Council's revised Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) was launched in 2013. This procedure was developed in conjunction with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and operates in all 32 Scottish Local Authorities.
- 1.2 The CHP deals with complaints in two stages: **Stage 1 – Frontline Resolution (FLR)** to be resolved in 5 working days with an extension available to a maximum of 10 working days, and **Stage 2 – Investigation** to be resolved within 20 working days.
- 1.3 An annual school complaints report was requested following discussion of a report detailing complaints handling in schools at Scrutiny Committee on 3 December 2014 (Report No 14/513 refers).
- 1.4 This report provides the Committee with school complaints information for Academic Year 2015-2016 (Appendix 1), along with the summary of learning points (Appendix 2).

2 STAGE 1 (FLR) SCHOOL COMPLAINTS

- 2.1 Headteachers will usually deal with issues raised at Stage 1 (FLR) of the CHP, with Stage 2 Investigations being undertaken by an Officer based in 2 High Street (eg an Education Project Officer or a Quality Improvement Officer).
- 2.2 FLR Briefing Sessions are available to all schools with the aim of raising awareness/improving understanding of the Stage 1 process, how to record an FLR, as well as general complaints handling advice, guidance and good practice. These sessions are jointly conducted by the ECS Service Complaints Co-ordinator and the Corporate Complaints Team.
- 2.3 Schools recorded 327 Stage 1 FLRs on the Council's Customer relationship Management (CRM) system for the Academic Year 2015-2016. This is a 43% increase in recording of FLRs from the previously reported Academic year 2014-

2015, and a total increase of 244% since Academic year 2013-2014 when the CHP was introduced.

- 2.4 Further information on Stage 1 FLR school complaints is detailed in Appendix 1.

3 STAGE 2 (INVESTIGATION) SCHOOL COMPLAINTS

- 3.1 Stage 2 Investigations are undertaken when a complainant is not satisfied with an FLR response, or where a matter is deemed too serious or complex to be dealt with at Stage 1.
- 3.2 A total of 29 Stage 2 complaints were received during Academic Year 2015-2016. There were also 29 Stage 2 received complaints in the previous Academic year.
- 3.3 Only 5.5% of Stage 1 FLR complaints were escalated to Stage 2, which would indicate the effective early resolution of complaints by staff at Stage 1, thereby preventing costly and resource intensive investigations at Stage 2. This compares to an escalation rate of 9% the previous Academic year.
- 3.4 Further information on Stage 2 Investigation school complaints is detailed in Appendix 1.

4 MONITORING AND LEARNING FROM SCHOOL COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 School complaints activity is scrutinised and monitored by the Head of Early Years and Primary, and the Head of Secondary and Inclusion. This is through the provision of weekly and monthly reports for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints respectively. School complaints also form part of the reporting of all ECS complaints to the ECS Senior Management Team.
- 4.2 Following completion of an investigation, the Investigating Officer may have recommendations/improvements for the Head of Service to allocate for action. Learning from complaints can prevent repeat complaints/issues occurring, and help identify emerging themes (learning points). The summary of learning points from Academic Year 2015-2016 is presented in Appendix 2.

5 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 School complaints will continue to be scrutinised at Head of Service and Senior Management Team level to ensure complaints performance and learning from complaints is monitored, and appropriate action is being taken.
- 5.2 Previous updates to the Council's CRM system allow more detailed recording of Stage 1 FLRs, therefore enabling more detailed management information to be obtained to monitor complaints performance within the CHP.
- 5.3 Training for staff dealing with school complaints at both Stages 1 and 2 is ongoing: this includes more in-depth training for Officers who have already received basic complaints training, as well as the complaints e-learning module available on **eric** for all staff. A focus of all training is the responsibility of ECS staff to try to resolve complaints at Stage 1 where possible (see paragraph 2.2).

5.4 Information has also been added to the Council's CHP and complaints information on the website explaining that:

- Education complaints in schools are usually dealt with as a Stage 1 FLR when it requires a response or action at Headteacher or school Senior Management Team level; and
- Parents/carers making a complaint involving a pupil with Additional Support for Learning needs also have additional options to resolving any disagreements with the school, such as independent mediation, applying for dispute resolution or making a referral to the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recording of Stage 1 school complaints has increased significantly since the first academic year reported to Committee. This is a result of the continued embedding of the CHP within schools.

6.2 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee:

- Considers and comments on this report and Appendices; and
- Notes that work is continuing to promote and further embed the CHP across all schools through ongoing advice, support and briefing/training sessions.

Author

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Approved

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	No
Workforce	No
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	No
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Yes
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	No
Legal and Governance	No
Risk	No
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	No
Communication	
Communications Plan	No

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 This section should set out how the proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

This report relates to Objective No (ii).

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This section should set out how the proposals relate to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Objectives.

The Perth and Kinross Community Plan 2013-2023 and Perth and Kinross Council Corporate Plan 2013/2018 set out five strategic objectives:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and

- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No (ii).

- 1.3 The report also links to the Education & Children's Services Policy Framework in respect of the following key policy area:

- Communication and Consultation

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 N/A

Workforce

- 2.2 N/A

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 N/A

3. Assessments

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.

The matters presented in this report were considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

However, no action is required as the Act does not apply to the matters presented in this report. This is because the Committee are requested to note the contents of the report only and the Committee are not being requested to approve, adopt or agree to an action or to set the framework for future decisions.

Sustainability

- 3.3 N/A

Legal and Governance

- 3.4 N/A

Risk

3.5 N/A

4. ConsultationInternal

4.1 The Education and Children's Services Senior Management Team and the Corporate Complaints and Governance Officer have been consulted on this report.

External

4.2 N/A

5. Communication

5.1 N/A

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

3. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: School Complaints Summary for Academic Year 2015-2016

Appendix 2: Summary of Learning from School Complaints – Academic Year 2015-2016