

REPORT TO: Audit and Governance Committee

MEETING DATE: 20 February 2018

BY: Depute Chief Executive (Resources & People Services)

SUBJECT: Internal Audit Report – Complaints Handling Procedure

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform the Audit and Governance Committee of the recently issued audit report on the Council’s Complaints Handling Procedure.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Audit and Governance Committee note the contents of the Executive Summary and Action Plan.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A review of the internal controls surrounding the Council’s Complaints Handling Procedure was undertaken as part of the Audit Plan for 2017/18.
- 3.2 The main objective of the audit was to ensure that the internal controls in place were operating effectively.
- 3.3 The main findings from our audit work are outlined in the attached report.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial - None

6.2 Personnel - None

6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

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DATE	8 February 2018

EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL – INTERNAL AUDIT COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

As part of the Audit Plan for 2017/18, a review was undertaken of the arrangements in place for handling complaints received by the Council. A summary of our main findings is outlined below.

1.2 Areas where Expected Controls were Met

- The Council has a Complaints Handling Procedure in place, which was approved in August 2012 – the Procedure complies with the Model Local Authority Complaints Handling Procedure developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). A separate Social Work Complaints Handling Procedure is in place and was implemented on 1 April 2017.
- A designated Customer Feedback Team is in place with responsibility for coordinating, investigating and reporting on all complaints received by the Council.
- For complaints received centrally (e.g. by the Contact Centre or online) a clear audit trail is maintained – all complaints are recorded on the CRM system and spreadsheets are held for each service area recording a summary of the complaint, the reason for the complaint, number of days taken to respond and the outcome.

1.3 Areas with Scope for Improvement

- The existing arrangements in place for the recording and reporting of complaints received by schools require review. *Risk – information may be incomplete or inaccurate.*
- There was a lack of adequate checking procedures in place to ensure that reports submitted to the Policy and Performance Review Committee were accurate and complete. *Risk – errors or omissions may occur and remain undetected.*
- For complex cases that had not been resolved within the specified timescales, there was a lack of evidence to indicate that extensions to timescales had been agreed with the customer. *Risk – non-compliance with the procedures in place.*
- The existing arrangements in place for reporting and publicising complaints information require review. *Risk – failure to comply with SPSO requirements.*
- At present, the annual performance report on complaints handling does not include all of the key indicators devised by the SPSO. *Risk – failure to comply with SPSO requirements.*

1.4 Summary

Our review of the arrangements in place for handling complaints received by the Council has highlighted some areas with scope for improvement. Detailed findings and recommendations are contained in our main Audit Report.

Mala Garden
Internal Audit Manager

February 2018

**EAST LOTHIAN COUNCIL – INTERNAL AUDIT
COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE**

ACTION PLAN

PARA REF	RECOMMENDATION	GRADE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	AGREED ACTION	RISK ACCEPTED/ MANAGED	AGREED DATE OF COMPLETION
3.2.2	Management should review the adequacy and effectiveness of the current arrangements in place for the recording and reporting of complaints received by schools.	Medium	Service Manager – Education (Strategy & Operations)	Agreed – to be reviewed.		June 2018
3.2.3	Management should ensure that sample checks are carried out on Stage 1 complaints to ensure that these have been correctly recorded.	Medium	Team Manager – Council Support	Agreed		In Place
3.3.1	Where extensions to timescales are required, Management should ensure compliance with the Complaints Handling Procedure.	Medium	Team Manager – Council Support	Implemented in Q1 of 2017/18.		In Place
3.4.1	Management should ensure compliance with the SPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure in respect of the reporting and publicising of complaints information.	Medium	Team Manager – Council Support	Customer Feedback web profile to be developed on new Council website.		August 2018

PARA REF	RECOMMENDATION	GRADE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	AGREED ACTION	RISK ACCEPTED/ MANAGED	AGREED DATE OF COMPLETION
3.4.2	Management should review the current arrangements in place to ensure that complaints information reported to the PPRC is accurate and complete.	Medium	Team Manager – Council Support	Data for reporting will be drafted by team members. Checking and validation of data will be carried out by Team Leader.		June 2018
3.4.3	To assist the Council in self-assessment, the reporting of performance and the undertaking of benchmarking activities, consideration should be given to reporting on all performance indicators devised by the SPSO.	Medium	Team Manager – Council Support	The eight SPSO performance indicators to be adopted within the Council's reporting mechanism for Customer Feedback.		February 2018

Grading of Recommendations

In order to assist Management in using our reports, we categorise our recommendations according to their level of priority as follows:

Level	Definition
High	Recommendations which are fundamental to the system and upon which Management should take immediate action.
Medium	Recommendations which will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing controls.
Low	Recommendations concerning minor issues that are not critical, but which may prevent attainment of best practice and/or operational efficiency.