

Enquiries to: Mary Pitcaithly
Telephone: 01324 506002
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Falkirk Council
Chief Executive Office

David Cullum
Clerk
Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Cullum

Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network

Thank you for your letter of 8 January 2014 following consideration of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's 2012-13 Annual Report by the Local Government & Regeneration Committee. In your letter you note that the Committee is interested in the operation of the local authority complaint handlers network. You also noted that it was understood that a small number of Councils, including Falkirk Council, were not members of the network.

Unfortunately this information is not correct. I can advise that Falkirk Council has been a member of the network since July 2013. Only one meeting has taken place since then, in September 2013, and this was attended by Beverley Ferguson from our Education Service who found it very helpful. Representatives from Falkirk Council will also attend the next meeting which is scheduled for 28 March 2014. In addition, the chair of the group has provided us with copies of the reports/presentations considered at meetings held prior to July 2013 and since then we have been on the circulation list for all paperwork. Officers from Falkirk Council are also members of the online forum set up by the Complaints Standards Authority. In future, in the interests of sharing best practice, we would suggest that it would be useful for the reports and presentations from the network meetings to be posted on the Valuing Complaints website or on the Knowledge Hub as this would ensure the learning is more widely accessible.

In terms of Falkirk Council's wider engagement with the SPSO and the Council's commitment to promoting effective complaints handling within the authority, a number of strands of work have been ongoing. For example, the SPSO's online complaints training package is available via the Council's internal learning system and in addition three training courses have been delivered to officers within the authority by the SPSO's training unit, two courses on complaints handling and the third focussing on investigation skills.

Chief Executive: Mary Pitcaithly OBE

Municipal Buildings,
Falkirk FK1 5RS.
LP 3 Falkirk-2.
Telephone: 01324 506070
Fax: 01324 506001

www.falkirk.gov.uk

The Council has recently implemented a bespoke recording system for complaints, the development of which has been informed by input from lead complaints officers from all Services. This will enable us to track performance more effectively across all Services and to identify trends and common themes. The system is now being looked at to ensure it can support the Council's compliance with SPSO's performance indicators for the CHP which will come into operation from the end of 2013/14. Performance on complaints is already part of the Council's agreed performance framework for all Services and as part of that is reported regularly to Members and reviewed as part of the Peer Assessment we have in place across Services. It is recognised, however, that there is scope to develop a more robust framework for indicators 8 and 9, which deal with customer satisfaction with our processes and how learning is promoted across the Council, and this is currently under consideration.

Mr Martin mentioned in his evidence that he has met with local authority Chief Executives and I, along with relevant officers, had a very useful meeting with him in March last year where we had the opportunity to discuss a number of key areas, many of which are also highlighted in the note of the committee. In terms of the Council's contact with the SPSO's office over the course of 2013, a report on complaints considered by the SPSO, those that were upheld and actions taken as a result of them will be submitted to the Council's Corporate Management Team for consideration on 10 February 2014.

I trust that this information is of assistance to you and the Committee but please don't hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Yours sincerely



CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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