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07 December 2015

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Steven Iserhoff
Committee Assistant
Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH991SP

Dear Mr Iserhoff

Implementing Changes following Recommendations of the SPSO

I am responding to your request for information on how East Dunbartonshire Council implemented changes following decision report number 201403677 regarding a child not being allowed to enrol in a council-run secondary school.

I have provided an update on each of the Ombudsman's recommendation below.

- **apologising for the failure to explain to Mrs C early in the process at what stage her complaint was being dealt with, and the failure to proactively update her on progress**

The Council's Director of Education and Children's Services wrote to Mrs C, apologising for not providing an explanation of the complaint handling process and for not keeping her updated.

- **reminding your complaints handlers to explain to complainants early in the process what stage their complaint is at, and the relevant timescales that apply**

Complaints may be received by any employee across any of our services and the Council considers that it is extremely important that all employees, supervisors and managers are aware of the correct procedures to follow when handling complaints. The Council has a well-established workforce strategy incorporating an approach to leadership and culture development that takes our employees through a development programme designed to equip them to deliver their accountabilities and embed consistent approaches, skills and behaviours across the organisation.

In response to the Ombudsman's recommendations a leadership information pack was prepared and cascaded to all employees through the established leadership channels. Employees were reminded of the complaints handling procedure and the importance of communicating with customers at all stages of the process. Standard paragraphs were circulated for use in

communications with customers and employees were advised that the Customer Service team was available to provide assistance if necessary.

- **reminding your complaints handlers that staff who were involved in the matter complained about, or involved at a previous stage of the complaints process, should not respond to (later stage) complaints**

In response to this recommendation a letter was sent to all managers in the Education service advising that if a complaint is escalated to stage 2 it should be referred to the Chief Education Officer who will appoint an officer to deal with it, reiterating that the officer allocated cannot be the same person who dealt with the complaint at stage 1.

In addition to the above advice to education officers the requirement for a different officer to respond to second stage complaints was also included in the leadership information pack on complaints handling that was issued to all council managers for cascade to their teams.

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on how Ombudsman reports are used to inform service improvements across the Council.

When an Ombudsman decision is received any implications for individual services, for the wider council, or for our complaints handling processes are analysed and improvement actions identified. These improvement actions are monitored through our usual reporting channels depending on the scope of the work required.

The Council is committed to engaging with the SPSO and has made recent improvements in its complaint handling and reporting procedures as a direct consequence of recommendations made by the SPSO in decision cases. The Corporate Complaints team has recently attended SPSO training on complaints investigation and is currently reviewing the Council's approach to handling and recording complaints.

Complaint handling performance is reported to Council in our 6 monthly customer service update report. When the Ombudsman makes improvement recommendations in respect of our complaints handling procedures any actions taken would be noted in the report with the expectation of improved performance in the following period.

When the Ombudsman makes improvement recommendations regarding individual service delivery processes these would, in the first instance, be referred to the service management team for investigation and resolution. However, recommendations about our wider organisational systems and processes would also be considered by the Customer Service Excellence team and where appropriate may be referred to our Change team for inclusion in the business process review programme.

The Council recognises that there will always be scope to improve our complaints handling and recording procedures and welcomes recommendations from the SPSO that will inform our continuous improvement in this area.

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I trust that this information is of assistance to the Committee, however, please do not hesitate to contact me if you required further information.

Yours sincerely

Gerry Cornes

**GERRY CORNES
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**