

## The Highland Council

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 19 June 2014

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| Agenda Item | 10       |
| Report No   | AS/14/14 |

### Corporate Complaint Process Report Report by Head of Digital Transformation

#### Summary

The Council's Corporate Complaints Handling Process was implemented on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and therefore we now have the 1<sup>st</sup> year of data to report to members. The Complaints process is in line with the requirements set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). This paper provides an update for members on the annual position and, as an example, a detailed analysis of the new format complaints reporting for Quarter 4 (1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) to show the latest position, including a high level analysis of our complaint handling and how we are using this information to improve performance.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Complaints raised by customers are an important way for the Council to gain valuable feedback and to put things right when necessary. It is therefore essential to have a robust, clear and effective complaints process in place to ensure that any issues raised are dealt with appropriately.
- 1.2 Implementation of the SPSO two stage complaint's process provides the Council with a single view of complaint data. This is a significant improvement and enables performance management to be applied.
- 1.3 The Ombudsman has provided a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Councils to use when monitoring performance, compliance and effectiveness of the complaints process (**Appendix 1**).

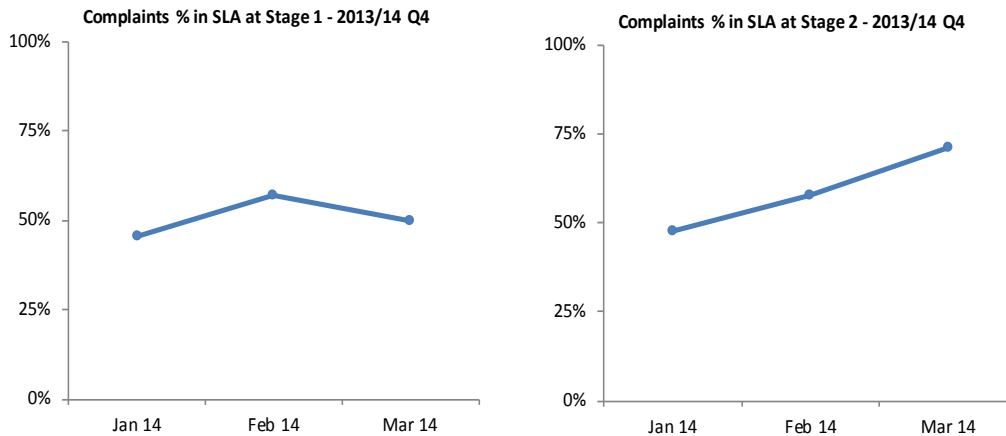
#### 2. Performance

- 2.1 The Highland Council has set a target of 80% of complaints to be closed in full at both Stage one and Stage two as a performance measure. The timescales are that complaints must be dealt with, in full, in 5 working days for Stage 1 and 20 working days for Stage 2. As per the policy, complex Stage 1 complaints can be extended with the agreement of the customer.
- 2.2 From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 there were 982 Stage 1 complaints and 59.37% were closed within SLA (including those with an agreed extension). From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 there were 363 Stage 2 complaints and 66.39% were closed within SLA, **Appendix 2** shows the position over the 12 month period. As can be expected the Council is a very large and complex organisation and it has taken time for the new process to bed in, especially at a time of organisational change.

2.3 Work has been ongoing to refine the Council's performance reporting to provide more refined information with regard to complaints and we now have detailed information for Quarter 4 performance against the targets, and this is provided in the tables below. For Quarter 4, there were 216 Stage one complaints, 109 (50.46%) were closed in full within the set timescales.

Of the 104 Stage two complaints, 64 (61.54%) were closed within the set timescales. The datasets below give further detail and a breakdown by service.

#### 2.4 Dataset 1: Corporate Complaints Handling Performance



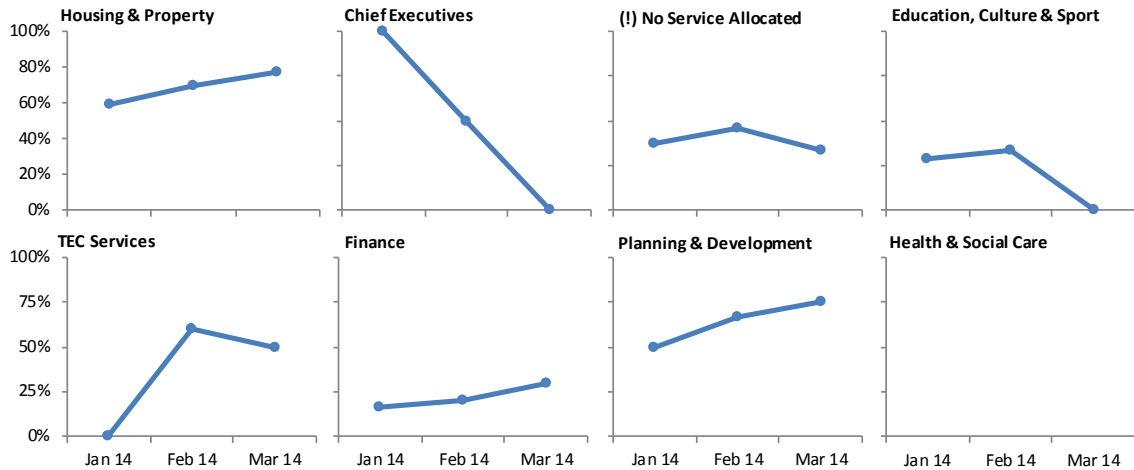
#### Dataset 2: Service Complaints Handling Performance

2.5 Detailed information is also now available for each individual service around compliance with set timescales at Stage one and Stage two. This is illustrated on the tables below. The single most noticeable reduction in performance relates to the Chief Executives Service. During Quarter 4, the Chief Executives Service received a large number of customer complaints pertaining to the proposals relating to the Customer Services Review paper which was presented at FHR committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014, and full Council on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014. Responses to these complaints were held back, pending the outcome of the member decision at the Highland Council on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014, and therefore missed the Stage 1 targets.

It should also be noted that:

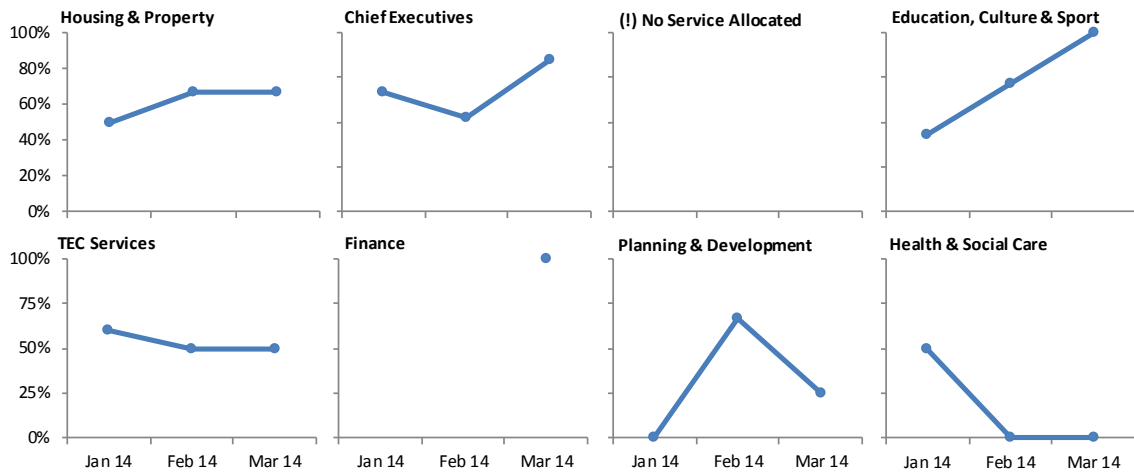
- Complaints which are allocated as 'no service allocated' is because that the complaints concern a number of services, and in these cases corporate customer services will work with the services concerned to achieve resolution.
- At present Social Work complaints require to follow a statutory procedure, following a slight different process. Also, while Stage One complaints are recorded and monitored locally and are dealt with by the Service 'in house', it is not feasible to collate them centrally and as such do not show on the corporate monitoring. Stage Two complaints are logged on CRM and agreed with the functional Head of Service, in consultation with the Service Director as per the corporate process.

**Complaints %in SLA at Stage 1 - 2013/14 Q4**



Data point not shown in the graphs is where there are no complaints at this stage

**Complaints %in SLA at Stage 2 - 2013/14 Q4**



Data point not shown in the graphs is where there are no complaints at this stage

**3. Action Plan Progress**

**3.1**

It is recognised that, corporately, more work needs to be done to ensure that all staff comply with both the process and timescales for handling complaints as such an action plan for improving performance has been put into place, which includes further training, improved visibility and performance reporting. Following the recent review, the Executive Leadership Team of the Council have now agreed to monitor complaints corporately on a quarterly basis at the weekly business meeting as part of the enhanced management focus.

**3.2**

Additional training on both the complaints process and CRM form completion is on-going. System and process training is also being further underpinned by developing the skillsets which will support Officials to ensure that those who are investigating customer complaints are in a position to deliver a thorough response, whilst increasing the likelihood of meeting timescales around complaint resolution.

- 3.3 Enhanced and dedicated training, delivered by the Ombudsman, accentuates a pro-active approach to complaint handling which will benefit the organisation as a whole. All Service Customer Service Officers will complete this training.
- 3.4 With the changing structure of the Council there has been a requirement to reconfigure all of the complaint reporting data. This work is currently on-going and it is envisaged that more detailed "complaint by service and type data" will be available for review by the Executive Leadership Team and ready for the next report to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.5 Following the management review of the Quarter 4 performance and the implementation of the action plan, significant improvement has been achieved in April 2014 as demonstrated in the corporate figures below.
- For April 2014, there were the 76 stage one complaints, 45 (59.21%) were closed in full within the set timescales.
  - Of the 19 stage two complaints, 17 (89.47%) were closed within the set timescales.

#### **4. Complaints Overview and Business Improvement**

- 4.1 The introduction of the new complaints procedure required a significant increase in scrutiny around complaints and outcomes, and the management information provided is now allowing for further scrutiny. As such the focus is both resolving complaints and to root cause analysis and how to avoid/prevent complaints from happening again. This ethos fits perfectly with Ombudsman guidance and requirements.
- 4.2 It is the Ombudsmans' intention to implement quality assurance and benchmarking protocols across all local authorities. Although this is still in the initial stages, once these measures are in place the Highland Council will apply and adhere to their recommendations. Actions around recommendations will be carried out as appropriate by any necessary system changes, management briefings and training. There are no timescales applied to this at present.
- 4.3 The Ombudsman has also been working with the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network to provide support and to help to ensure core principles are being adhered to; with good practice mentored and shared. This Network will form benchmarking protocols with the emphasis placed on measuring the quality of the complaint handling. As such it is important that Customer Services continue to contribute to this network.

#### **5. Implications**

##### **5.1 Resource Implications**

There are resource implications against the action plan regarding dedicated training for officers, the updating of our self-help training guides, the reconfiguration of the CRM system to accommodate the services changes and the production of management information reports. This resource requirement also includes specialist training from the Ombudsman for the Council's senior

managers. All services have been requested to ensure that the necessary resources are in place and to prioritise the improvement of complaints handling in order to meet the corporate performance targets.

## 5.2 Risks/Equality/Legal/Climate Change/ Gaelic /Rural Implications

**Equality Implications:** An initial screening of Equal Impact Assessment (EQIA) was completed during process design. There was no evidence of, or the possibility of, negative impact, and no requirement for immediate remedial or mitigating action be taken without therefore there was no need to undertake a full EQIA.

**Risk Implications:** Complaints handling performance is a critical area of the Council in how it handles its customer contact. Should the Council fail to meet the performance targets it could impact negatively on the overall performance of the Council.

**Legal/Climate Change/Gaelic/Rural implications** – no known implications

### Recommendation

Members are requested to note:

- i. The Council Quarter 4 performance results and the improving direction of travel for indicated for April 2014
- ii. The actions underway to ensure the complaints handling procedure is fully embedded and that complaints are dealt with within the agreed timescales.

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Date: 6 June 2014

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## Appendix 1 – Ombudsman Key Performance Indicators

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | The total number of complaints received per thousand of population.   |
| 2 | Complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two as a percentage of all complaints closed.  |
| 3 | The number of complaints upheld, partially upheld or not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage. |
| 4 | The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.   |
| 5 | The number of complaints which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days and 20 working days.                       |
| 6 | The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension of 5 or 20 day timelines has been authorised.                    |
| 7 | A statement to report customer satisfaction with the complaints service provided.   |
| 8 | A statement outlining improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints.                              |

## Appendix 2: Corporate Complaints Performance April 2013-March 2014

