

The Highland Council
Community Services Committee
6 November 2014

Agenda Item	20
Report No	COM 46/14

Report on Community Service Complaints, Freedom of Information Requests and Compliments from 1 April 2014 to 31 August 2014

Report by the Director of Community Services

Summary

This report provides details on the number of complaints, freedom of information requests and compliments received by Community Services in the first five months of 2014/15, and outlines actions in place to improve performance.

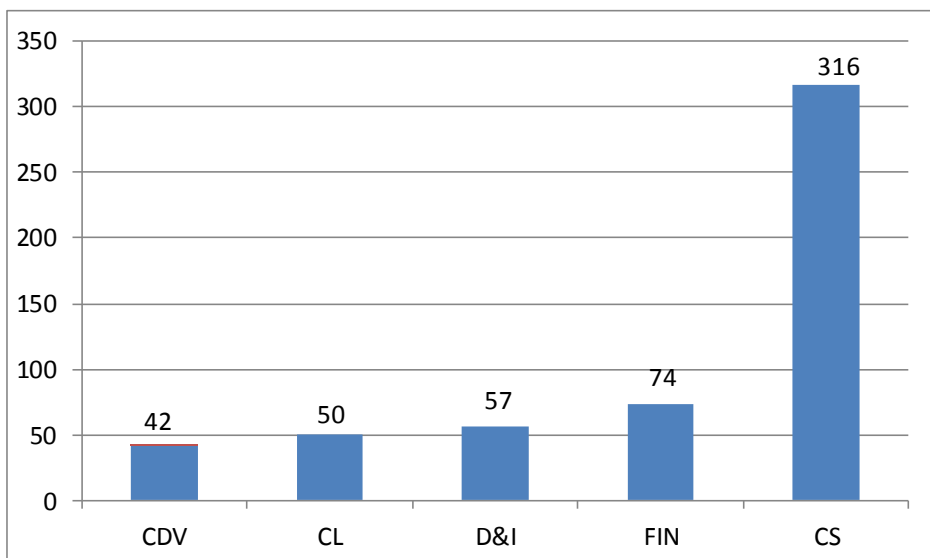
1. Background

- 1.1 The Highland Council has set a target for 80% of complaints to be closed off in full within the target times of 5 days for Stage 1 complaints and 20 days for Stage 2 complaints. In certain circumstances Stage 1 complaints can be extended, but only if the customer agrees.
- 1.2 The target for responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests is 20 days.
- 1.3 Community Services receives the highest number of complaints and FOI requests compared to other Council Directorates. We have identified ways in which we can improve our performance and as a result give the customer a better experience when contacting the Service.
- 1.4 The Council has a commitment to increase the number of issues resolved at first contact. By working together with colleagues to devise better information the Service will improve performance, improve customer service and reduce complaints.

2. Performance Information

- 2.1 In the five months from 1 April 2014 to 31 August 2014 Community Services has received 288 stage 1 complaints and 28 stage 2 complaints.

2.2 Graph 1 Complaints received Council-Wide by Service



2.3 Table 1 Top 5 Categories of Stage 1 Complaints (Community Services)

Category of Complaint	Number
Housing Repair	61
General	36
Heating	10
Dampness	5
Bathroom	5
Kitchen	5
Grounds Maintenance	65
Grass cutting including garden Aid	22
Grass at cemeteries	3
Overgrown paths	12
General maintenance	25
Roads Maintenance	47
General road maintenance	20
Flooding	1
Pavements	6
Potholes	5
Road Markings	1
Signs	2
Road Safety	12
Waste Management	38
Bulky Uplifts	2
Bins blocking driveways/paths staff behaviour	27
Litter	6
Dog Fouling	2
Graffiti	1
Others	76
Others Staff Treatment/Attitude	42
Political Signage	21
Housing Allocation	13

2.4 Of the stage 1 complaints, 51.2% were responded to within the 5 day deadline, however 53 had their initial 5 day deadline extended by a further 5 days in agreement with the customer. Overall the average number of days to close stage 1 cases was 8.2 days compared to the Highland-wide average of 7.5 days.

2.5 There were initially a number of complaints regarding the grounds maintenance contract, however these appear to have been dealt with and complaints have now decreased significantly. This continues to be monitored closely.

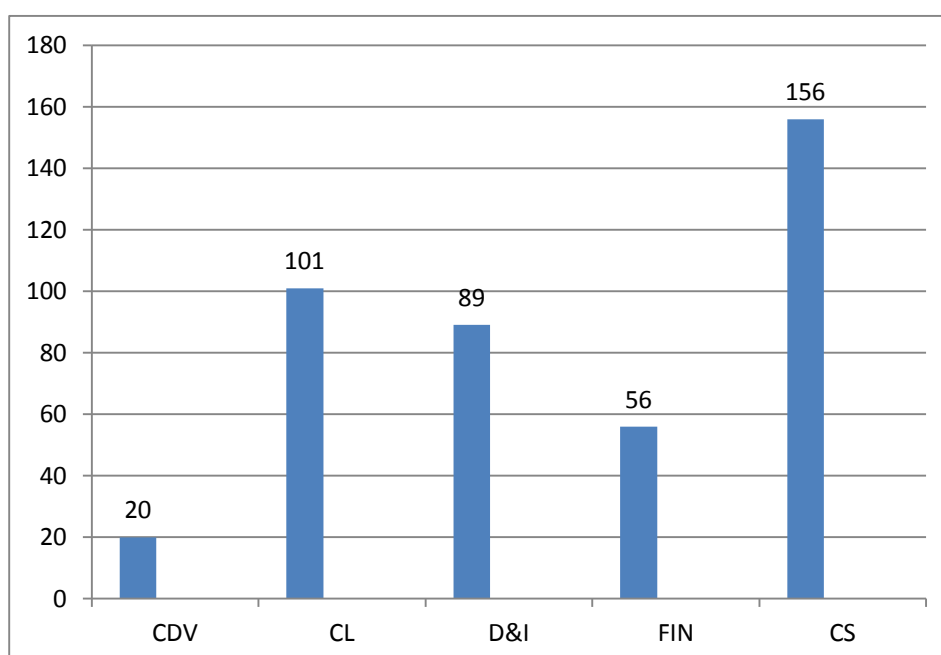
2.6 *Table 2 All Categories of Stage 2 Complaints (Community Services)*

Category of Complaint	Number
Anti Social Behaviour	3
Grounds Maintenance	3
Grass Cutting	3
Housing Repairs	4
Road Safety/Maintenance	6
Environmental Issues	3
Housing Allocation	2
Public Toilets	2
Ferries	1
Personal Information	1

2.7 Of the Stage 2 complaints 69.4% were responded to within the 20 days deadline. Overall the average number of days to close a stage 2 case was 18.5 days compared to the Highland-wide average of 17.7 days.

3. Freedom of Information Requests

3.1 *Graph 2 Total Freedom of Information Requests Received (All Services)*



3.2 *Table 3 Freedom of Information Requests (Community Services)*

Category of Request	Number
Environmental Health	31
Burials/Cemeteries	3
Ferries	3
Fleet Information	4
Flooding	1
Grounds Maintenance	7
Housing	33
Parking tickets/fines/charges	15
Public Toilets	3
Roads Maintenance	37
Street Lighting	3
Waste Management	16

3.3 The target time for responding to FOI requests is 20 days. 149 (95.51%) of these were responded to in time. 6 were overdue and 1 is on-going

4. Compliments

4.1 Community Services received 40 compliments between April and August. Compliments are forwarded to the appropriate managers and communicated to the teams involved in delivering the services.

4.2 *Table 4 Compliments Received (Community Services)*

Category of Compliment	Number
Flooding	1
Grass Cutting	4
Grounds Maintenance	5
Housing Repairs	9
Overgrown Pathways/Plants	1
Communication	1
Public Toilets	3
Road Maintenance	3
Road Safety	1
Waste Management	12

5. Monitoring

5.1 Weekly reports on the number of complaints and FOI cases open, outstanding and closed are circulated to the management team and performance is discussed every fortnight at the Service Management Team meeting. Performance is monitored at the Chief Executive's Quarterly Monitoring Review meetings and is reported at the Community Services Strategic Committee.

6. Service Improvements

6.1 The tables above give the Service a benchmark position to measure improvements

from.

- 6.2 The Performance team is looking at the causes of complaints and establishing what lessons can be learned so we can reduce the volume of similar types of complaints being raised again.
- 6.3 As part of our programme of self assessment we will be interrogating our systems and linking repairs requests to complaints regarding repairs to identify areas for improvement.
- 6.4 Through increased scrutiny, the Performance team has identified a number of training issues in relation to how staff close off complaint cases. Where a problem is identified the staff member is contacted and instructed on how to progress the case so that the outcome is recorded and the case closed correctly. Early indications are that this is proving effective.
- 6.5 The Performance Team is working with Officers in the Service in the preparation of scripts that they can use to deal with routine complaints at first point of contact.
- 6.6 Likewise the Service is working closely with the Service Centre/Point network to provide them with up-to-date information so calls can be closed off at the first contact. This will give the customer a better experience and reduce the calls coming to the Service.
- 6.7 Where there have been complaints received regarding staff attitude they are escalated to the Line Manager for response.

7. Implications

- 7.1 There are no known resource, legal, equality, climate change/carbon clever; rural, risks or Gaelic implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note the performance on complaints and FOI requests and improvement actions that are underway.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 24 October 2014

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