

## The Highland Council

Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 18 June 2015

Agenda Item	10
Report No	AS/14/15

### Corporate Complaint Process Report Report by Depute Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Development

#### Summary

This paper provides an update for Members on the Council's Corporate Complaints Process for the period 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015. Comparative data on our annual performance is also included along with a high level analysis of our complaint handling and how we are using this to better inform our understanding of complaints and improve performance.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Complaints provide valuable feedback to the Council and the opportunity to put things right for the customer when necessary. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has implemented a mandatory two stage complaint which all councils have had to adopt and the process provides the Council with a single view of complaint data and helps to ensure that there is a robust, clear and effective complaints process in place to make sure that any issues raised are dealt with appropriately.

#### 2. Performance

- 2.1 The Highland Council has set a target of 80% of complaints to be closed in full at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 as a Key Performance Indicator. 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 October 2014 to 31 March 2015, there were a total of 670 complaints handled. Of this total volume, 564 were handled as Stage 1 complaints with 50.81% closed within Service Level Agreement (SLA). During this period there were 106 Stage 2 complaints with 69.81% closed within SLA.

This is an improving performance trend on the previous six months for both Stage 1 (improving by 3.89%) and Stage 2 (improving by 4.29%).

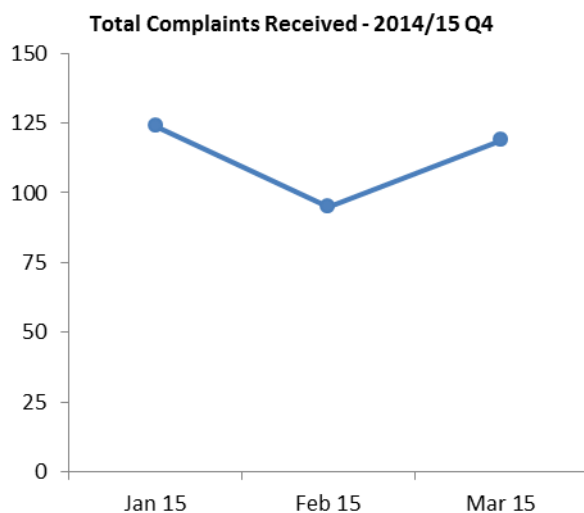
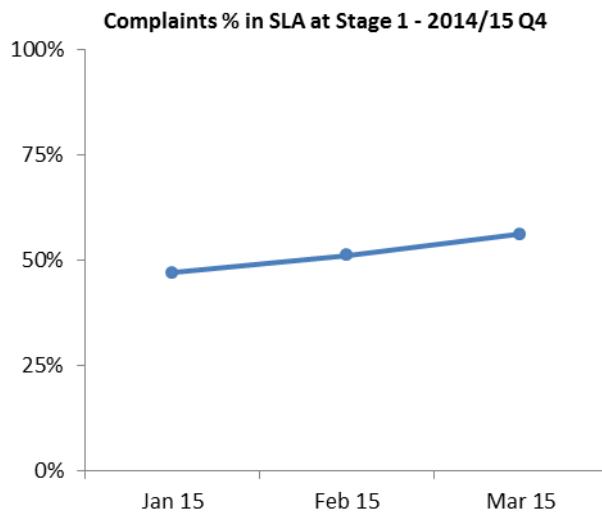
- 2.3 Comparison of performance data on these indicators for the period April 2014 to March 2015 has been carried out (with the previous year's data used as a baseline). This targeted approach helps us to identify and scrutinise peaks and troughs in performance. It should be noted that Stage 1 performance overall still remains a concern for the Council and as such the complaints process has undergone an assessment using the Public Sector Improvement Framework

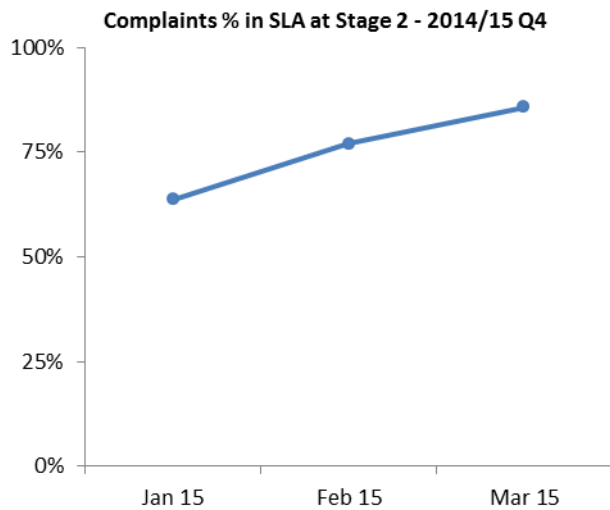
process.

2.4 For our most recent quarter (Q4 1 Jan 2014 to 31 March 2015) there were a total of 343 complaints handled. Of this total volume, 289 Stage 1 complaints, 149 (51.56%) were closed in full within the set timescales. This number increases to 161 (55.71%) when we include where extensions were agreed with customers.

Of the 49 Stage 2 complaints, 36 (73.47%) were closed within the set timescales. The datasets below detail how the Council is performing corporately with further detail giving a breakdown by service in section 2.6.

## 2.5 Dataset 1: Corporate Complaints Handling Performance





## 2.6 Dataset 2: Service Complaints Handling Performance

With reporting now updated to reflect our new service structure detailed information is available per service around compliance with set timescales at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. This is illustrated in the tables below. It is important to note that with the amalgamation of services there has been ongoing work on the “bedding in” of the supporting team structure to manage complaints.

It should also be noted that:

- Complaints which are allocated as ‘no service allocated’ are complaints which have not been assigned to a single service at the time of reporting, in these cases corporate customer services will work in conjunction with the services concerned to allocate and resolve.
- Social Work complaints continue to follow a statutory procedure, which follows a slightly different process.

### Dataset 2: Complaints Handling Performance By Service – Oct 14–Mar 15

	Stage 1				Stage 1 Inc. Extension			
	Total S1 Cases	No. In SLA	% In SLA	25% 50% 75% 100%	No. In SLA	% In SLA	25% 50% 75% 100%	
<b>Highland Council Total</b>	584	283	50.18%		308	54.81%		
Community Services	343	169	49.27%		186	54.23%		
Finance	74	37	50.00%		41	55.41%		
Development & Infrastructure	53	33	62.26%		37	69.81%		
Care & Learning	32	13	40.63%		13	40.63%		
Corporate Development	36	18	50.00%		18	50.00%		
(): No Service Allocated	16	6	37.50%		6	37.50%		
Chief Executives Office	10	7	70.00%		7	70.00%		

	Stage 2			25% 50% 75% 100%
	Total S2 Cases	No. In SLA	% In SLA	
<b>Highland Council Total</b>	108	74	68.81%	
Community Services	42	28	66.67%	
Finance	11	11	100.00%	
Development & Infrastructure	29	20	68.97%	
Care & Learning	15	7	46.67%	
Corporate Development	8	7	87.50%	
(): No Service Allocated	0	0	#DIV/0!	
Chief Executives Office	1	1	100.00%	

Stage 1 SLA = 5 Working Days  
 Stage 2 SLA = 20 Working Days

### 3. Progress to Date

- 3.1 Community Services, as one of our largest customer facing services, continues to receive the largest proportion of recorded customer complaints. As such their Management Team has been working closely with Customer Service to improve resolution at first point of contact across all queries with particular emphasis on complaint handling. This work has been incorporated into a Training Programme and Quality Assurance framework which is being piloted in the Service Centre in Alness and will be rolled out across Customer Services in the coming months.
- 3.2 The Audit and Scrutiny Committee had requested sight of the types of complaints that customers were making. The table below presents this information with a view of the top 10 types of complaints for the reporting period October 2014 to March 2015.

#### Top complaints categories Oct 14 – Mar 15

Subject	Total
Housing repairs	116
Council tax	55
Road maintenance	42
Antisocial Behaviour	22
Grounds Maintenance	14
Missed bin	14
Staff behaviour	10
Determining planning applications	9
Gritting	8
Debt Recovery	7
Housing allocation	7
Housing Benefit	7
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	7

- 3.3 Significant progress continues to be made on key elements of the Action Plan reported to the last Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Action Plan (Appendix 1) highlights the work done to date; including the actions taken to improve accessibility for customers by re-design of our online complaints form and the improved training materials and support for officers.
- 3.4 An assessment of our Corporate Complaints process using the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) is currently being undertaken. When complete this will mean that a systematic and comprehensive review of the Corporate Complaints Process will have been carried out, it will help us to identify our strengths and areas for improvement, inform annual planning and define improvement initiatives that are monitored and measured through the Performance and Risk Management System (PMRS). A summary of findings will be reported to the next Audit and Scrutiny on 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015.

#### **4. Ombudsman Update**

- 4.1 The Ombudsman intends to implement quality assurance and benchmarking protocols across all local authorities. Once these measures are in place the Highland Council will apply and adhere to their recommendations, with actions around recommendations carried out as appropriate by any necessary system changes, management briefings and training. Timescales around this work will be confirmed in the near future.
- 4.2 The Highland Council's first Annual Complaints Report 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 was published in February 2015. This has been produced in line with SPSO requirements and is available for public to view on the Highland Council website. This Annual Report can be viewed on the Council's website
- 4.3 The Ombudsman will continue to work with the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network, providing support and help to ensure core principles are being adhered to; with good practice mentored and shared. As such it is important that Customer Services continue to contribute to this network.

#### **5. Implications.**

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

There have been limited resource implications against the Action Plan, including partnership working with Services to improve complaint resolution at first point of contact and the self-assessment element of the PSIF work.

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

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

**Equality Implications:** An initial screening of Equal Impact Assessment (EQIA) was completed during process design.

**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 implications** – no known implications

## **6. Recommendation**

Members are requested to note:

- The recent improvement to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints over the last 6 months
- The benchmarking activity of the Ombudsman.
- The PSIF work that is being undertaken and the ongoing work in the existing action plan to ensure continued improvement.

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Date: 1.6.15

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## Appendix 1

### Corporate Complaints Process – Action Plan for Improvement – Update June 2015

As a result of our ongoing continuous improvement plan we have taken the opportunity to maximise and prioritise complaints logging and handling. The Action Plan below demonstrates some of the key actions with progress to date.

	<b>Key Actions</b>	<b>Progress to Date</b>
1.	Review process (including forms) to simplify and continue to apply mandatory standardised approach, including drop down menus and mandatory fields.	All changes to complaints E forms and online forms and workflow were completed on 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2014.
2.	PSIF assessment of the Complaints Process to be undertaken.	Underway
3.	Review of complaints process to improve and continue to promote a positive complaints management culture ensuring full compliance with processes and procedures.	It is envisaged that the outcome of the PSIF process will produce a more definitive and robust Improvement Plan for Complaints.
4.	Review and improve training materials and delivery.	It is envisaged that the outcome of the PSIF process will produce a more definitive and robust Improvement Plan for Complaints.
5.	Service Management Teams to ensure that Complaint Co-ordinators continue to be supported to prioritise complaint handling and resolution.	It is envisaged that the outcome of the PSIF process will produce a more definitive and robust Improvement Plan for Complaints.
6.	Strengthen quality assurance process by applying sampling (establish random sampling process).	It is envisaged that the outcome of the PSIF process will produce a more definitive and robust Improvement Plan for Complaints.