

The Highland Council

Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 17 November 2015

Agenda Item	6
Report No	AS/28/15

**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 April 2015 to 30 September 2015 along with comparative data and a high level analysis of our complaint handling per service. Findings identified as part of the recent Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) review of the Corporate Complaints Process are also included along with the resulting improvement initiatives and actions in hand to step-up performance.

1. Background

- 1.1 Highland Council has along with all other Scottish local government authorities introduced a 2 stage complaints handling procedure. This mandatory complaints process, defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) put in place a series of performance indicators. The data provided from these indicators is reported to the SPSO on an annual basis.
- 1.2 In addition to these indicators set by the SPSO, 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. Current Performance

- 2.1 The majority of complaints dealt with by the council are resolved at the initial stage of the procedure, within five working days. From 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015, there were a total of 912 complaints handled. There were 672 complaints handled as Stage 1 with 255 (38%) closed within Service Level Agreement (SLA). During this period there were 192 Stage 2 complaints with 103 (54%) closed within SLA.
- 2.2 Comparison of performance data on these indicators with the previous 6 months (1 October 2014 to 31 March 2015) has been carried out. This helps us to identify and scrutinise peaks and troughs in performance. This analysis demonstrates that there has been a significant increase of 26% in the number of complaints received while there has also been a corresponding dip in

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performance for Stage 1 (8%) and Stage 2 (by 13%).

- 2.3 It should be noted that at this time both Stage 1 and Stage 2 performance overall remain a concern for the Council and as such the complaints process has undergone an assessment using the Public Sector Improvement Framework process the detail can be found in Section 7 of this report.

3 Complaint Handling Performance by Service

- 3.1 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 should also be noted that Social Work complaints continue to follow a statutory procedure, which follows a slightly different process.

Performance Against Timescales by Service – Stage 1			
<i>The number and percentage of complaints at Stage 1 which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days.</i>			
Service	Total No. of Stage 1 Cases	No. in SLA	% in SLA
Community Services	434	120	27.65%
Finance	92	50	54.35%
Development & Infrastructure	48	29	60.42%
Corporate Development	36	21	58.33%
Care & Learning	35	19	54.29%
Chief Executive's	14	5	35.71%
No Service Allocated	13	11	84.62%
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.			

Performance Against Timescales by Service – Stage 2			
<i>The number and percentage of complaints at Stage 2 which were closed in full within the set timescales of 20 working days.</i>			
Service	Total No. of Stage 2 Cases	No. in SLA	% in SLA
Community Services	117	52	44.44%
Development & Infrastructure	25	19	76.00%
Care & Learning	24	9	37.50%
Finance	13	13	100.00%
Corporate Development	11	8	72.73%
Chief Executive's	2	2	100.00%
No Service Allocated	0	N/A	N/A
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.			

4. Complaint Categories

- 4.1 Further detail on complaint categories is outlined in the next table, which provides insight into the top 10 types of complaints that were reported during the latest 6 month period.

Top 10 complaints categories - April 15 to September 15

Subject	Total
Housing Repairs	79
Road Maintenance	50
Council Tax	47
Ground Maintenance	36
Staff Behaviour	30
Progress Chasing	27
Antisocial Behaviour	21
Previous Complaint	20
Missed Bins	17
Grass Cutting	14

This detailed information is shared with complaint staff and service managers so that there is an opportunity to explore the root cause of complaints, learn from them and address the issues.

- 4.2 It is understood that as one of our main customer facing services, Community Services would receive the largest number of customer complaints. A number of initiatives have been undertaken with Customer Services to increase resolution at first point of contact and improve complaint handling. While this work is well in hand it does form the basis of ongoing continuous improvement to address Stage 1 performance in particular. Progress on this is reported on quarterly basis to Community Services Committee.
- 4.3 It is important to recognise that while the Council faces challenges in terms of delivering savings targets it will have a negative impact on our complaint performance. We have to acknowledge a significant risk that there will be an increase in complaints at a time when the Council will have less resource available to resolve complaints within the allocated timeframes.

5. Annual Performance Data

- 5.1 The Highland Council's first Annual Complaints Report covering the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 was published in February 2015. Produced in line with SPSO requirements, this report is available to view online on the Highland Council website.

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5.2 The following table provides some high level detail around our annual complaints performance and provides insight into how we are performing as an organisation on an annual basis against some key SPSO set indicators.

Annual Performance – Comparative Data (Periods 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 & 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015)		
	1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014	1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015
Number of Complaints closed at Stage 1 & Stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed.	1,345 closed in total. 982 (73.01%) at Stage 1 363 (26.99%) at Stage 2	1,394 closed in total. 1,137 (81.56%) at Stage 1 257 (18.44%) at Stage 2
<p>What does this tell us? This tells us that we are closing more complaints at Stage 1. This means that we are speaking to our customers sooner and addressing more complaints at the first point of contact.</p>		
Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.	Average for Stage 1 - 8.79 days Average for Stage 2 - 18.40 days	Average for Stage 1 - 8.26 days Average for Stage 2 - 19.28 days
<p>What does this tell us? The decrease in the average number of days taken for a response to a complaint at Stage 1 tells us that we are moving in the right direction, although there is still a lot of work to be done. For Stage 2 this data highlights that on average we are meeting the target of 20 working days, but that the complexity of some complaints has had an impact on our performance targets.</p>		
Number of complaints which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 & 20 working days.	521 (53.05%) Stage 1 complaints closed in full within set timescale of 5 working days. 240 (66.12%) Stage 2 complaints closed in full within the set timescale of 20 working days.	550 (48.47%) Stage 1 complaints closed in full within set timescale of 5 working days. 169 (65.78%) Stage 2 complaints closed in full within the set timescale of 20 working days.
<p>What does this tell us? We recognise that achieving our 80% targets for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 are both aspirational and challenging. Early discussions with the Ombudsman have highlighted through the current benchmarking exercise and engagement with other local authorities that we may be the only council to have set their own internal performance indicator around complaints and that is not a requirement of the SPSO.</p>		

6. Ombudsman Update

- 6.1 In September 2015, the Highland Council submitted our latest annual performance figures for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 to the SPSO. Analysis of the full set of performance indicators is being undertaken by the SPSO and we will receive feedback on this and there will then be an opportunity to benchmark our performance against other local authorities.
- 6.2 One of the Ombudsman's objectives is to implement quality assurance and benchmarking protocols across all local authorities. The Highland Council will apply and adhere to any resulting measures and recommendations carried out as appropriate by any necessary system changes, management briefings and training. Timescales around this work will be confirmed in the future.
- 6.3 Customer Services recognises the importance of continuing to contribute to the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network. The Ombudsman works with network to provide support and help to ensure core principles are being adhered to. This forum also provides the ideal opportunity to ensure that good practice mentored and shared.

7. Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF)

- 7.1 An assessment of our Corporate Complaints process using the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) took place from March to June this year. This systematic and comprehensive review identified a number of improvement initiatives and actions which are reported through the Council's PQRMS system. There were 43 actions identified, 7 of which were assigned a high priority, and are outlined below along with the progress to date.

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7.1.2

	Action	Comment
1	Appropriate security levels (sensitive information) and closed queues to be implemented in the new CRM system.	This will be addressed through the implementation of our new CRM system which we anticipate going live in February 2016
2	Create a quality checking process	Work on this is underway and this should be implemented by December 2015.
3	Full range of SPSO, cost and benchmarking indicators to be investigated and developed and used internally, including quality indicators	Initial scoping exercise to be complete by end of Jan 2016.
4	Good practice feedback from Ombudsman cases to be fed back to Complaints Handler Network to ensure consistent approach across the council to complaints handling	Complete.
5	Implement complaint quality standards, including values, for all stage 2 complaints	Review of quality standards to be implemented, to be completed by December 2015.
6	Employee Development to devise an approach to allow inclusion of complaints handling and customer care as part of the ERD process	Complete
7	Employee Development to allow inclusion of complaints handling and customer care as part of the Induction process	Complete.

8. Implications

8.1 Resource Implications

There are limited resource implications against the resulting actions from 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.

8.2 Risks Implications:

There is a significant risk in the Councils ability to achieve its targets as the council delivers its budget savings. Potentially there will be an increase in complaints at a time when there is a reduction in resource available to handle complaints. 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.

8.3 **Risk/ Equality/Legal/Climate Change/ Gaelic Implications**

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

Legal/Climate Change/Gaelic implications – no known implications.

9. Recommendation

Members are requested to note:

- The 6 month and annual performance for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints
- The benchmarking activity of the Ombudsman.
- The Risk around increasing complaints against decreasing budgets
- The PSIF work that has been undertaken and the ongoing work in the actions to ensure improvement.

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Date: 04 November 2015

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