

**The Highland Council**

**Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 16 June 2016**

Agenda Item	8
Report No	AS/11/16

**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 2015 to 31 March 2016 along with comparative data and includes a high level analysis of our complaint handling per service.

Progress on actions from the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) review of the Corporate Complaints Process is also included.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Highland Council operates, along with all other Scottish local government authorities, 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, which are reported to the SPSO on an annual basis.
- 1.2 In addition to these SPSO indicators, 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, with a target resolution timescale of 5 working days. From 1 October 2015 to 31 March 2016, there were a total of 793 complaints handled. There were 628 complaints handled as Stage 1 with 318 (50.6%) closed within Service Level Agreement (SLA). During this period there were 115 Stage 2 complaints with 67 (58.3%) closed within SLA.
- 2.2 Comparison of performance data on these indicators with the previous 6 months (1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015) has been carried out. This helps us to identify and scrutinise peaks and troughs in performance. Analysis demonstrates that there has been a decrease of 12.6% in the number of complaints received while there has also been a corresponding increase in performance for Stage 1 (up 14.2%) and Stage 2 (up 7.8%).

2.3 While performance overall is still a concern, the improving trend outlined above for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is very welcome. It highlights that the actions undertaken as a result of the Public Sector Improvement Framework assessment process are being “bedded in” and continue to support the on-going work around stepping up performance (see section 7 of this report). In addition, in order to improve future performance, the Council has been reviewing and updating officer training with regard to complaints handling, together with providing regular reporting to the Executive Leadership Team and service management teams, and it is anticipated that these actions will assist in improving complaints handling.

### 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 Care complaints continue to follow a statutory procedure, which follows a slightly different process.

<b>Performance Against Timescales by Service – Stage 1</b>			
<i>The number and percentage of complaints at Stage 1 which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days.</i>			
<b>Service</b>	<b>Total No. of Stage 1 Cases</b>	<b>No. in SLA</b>	<b>% in SLA</b>
Community Services	456	205	44.96%
Finance	52	35	67.31%
Development & Infrastructure	31	19	61.29%
Care & Learning	26	14	53.85%
Corporate Development	31	22	70.97%
No Service Allocated	19	17	89.47%
Chief Executives Office	13	6	46.15%
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.			

<b>Performance Against Timescales by Service – Stage 2</b>			
<i>The number and percentage of complaints at Stage 2 which were closed in full within the set timescales of 20 working days.</i>			
<b>Service</b>	<b>Total No. of Stage 2 Cases</b>	<b>No. in SLA</b>	<b>% in SLA</b>
Community Services	73	43	58.90%
Finance	5	5	100.00%
Development & Infrastructure	20	15	75.00%
Care & Learning	14	2	14.29%
Corporate Development	3	2	66.67%
No Service Allocated	0	0	N/A
Chief Executives Office	0	0	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.			

3.2 Community Services as one of our main customer facing services receives the largest number of complaints. As a result of a number of targeted initiatives undertaken with Customer Services to increase resolution at first point of contact and improve complaint handling there are significant signs of progress being made in both Stage 1 (17.3% increase) and Stage 2 (14.5%). This improving performance does highlight the benefits of continually focusing on performance, which is supported and sustained by reporting on a quarterly basis to Community Services Committee.

#### 4. Complaint Categories

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

##### Top 10 complaints categories – Oct 2015 to March 2016

Subject	Total
Housing Repairs	101
Road Maintenance	77
Staff Behaviour	46
Progress Chasing	38
Parking	25
Previous Complaint	21
Council Tax	19
Missed Bins	18
Litter	13
Antisocial Behaviour	13

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 In light of the recent significant VR related staffing changes and future council re-design it is important to recognise that it may be challenging to maintain, increase and raise our performance to meet our targets around complaint resolution.

#### 5. Annual Performance Data

5.1 The Highland Council's second Annual Complaints Report covering the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 was published in February 2016. Produced in line with SPSO requirements, this report is available to view online on the Highland Council website.

5.2 The following table provides some high level detail around our annual

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complaints performance and provides insight into how we are performing as an organisation on an annual basis against some key SPSO set indicators.

<b>Annual Performance – Comparative Data</b> (Periods 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 & 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016)		
	<b>1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015</b>	<b>1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016</b>
Number of Complaints closed at Stage 1 & Stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed.	1,394 closed in total. 1,137 (81.6%) at Stage 1 and 257 (18.4%) at Stage 2	1650 closed in total. 1330 (80.6%) at Stage 1 and 319 (19.3%) at Stage 2
<p><b>What does this tell us?</b> This tells us that we there was an 18% increase in the number of complaints received in 15\16 compared to the previous year and that we continue to receive and resolve the majority of our 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 8.3 days  Average for Stage 2 19.3 days	Average for Stage 1 12.2 days  Average for Stage 2 27.8 days
<p><b>What does this tell us?</b> While we meet timescale targets on many occasions, there is a need to focus on meeting, where we can, timescales across all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints to improve the average performance. It is important to note that having even a small number of complaints that take a long period of time to resolve can have a very adverse impact on this indicator.</p>		
Number of complaints which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 & 20 working days.	550 Stage 1 complaints closed in full within set timescale of 5 working days.  167 Stage 2 complaints closed in full within the set timescale of 20 working days.	574 Stage 1 complaints closed in full within set timescale of 5 working days.  170 Stage 2 complaints closed in full within the set timescale of 20 working days.
<p><b>What does this tell us?</b> We recognise that achieving our 80% targets for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 continues to be challenging. We also understand that we may be the only local authority to have set their own internal performance indicator around complaints and that is not a requirement of the SPSO. We will continue to use this target to benchmark our performance and drive improvement.</p>		

## 6. Ombudsman Update

- 6.1 We will submit our latest annual performance figures for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 to the SPSO in September. Analysis of the full set of performance indicators will be undertaken by the SPSO and the Improvement Service and we will receive feedback on this. There will also be an opportunity to benchmark our performance against other similar local authorities. We understand that the SPSO will also be issuing guidance to all local authorities shortly around production of the new annual complaints report for 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.
- 6.2 The SPSO has grouped similar local authorities into “families” so that good practice can be shared and benchmarking can take place. Scottish Borders Council as a member of our family group, have indicated that they would like to undertake an initial benchmarking exercise with us. This would present us with a point of reference with regards to the standards we are achieving and present us with the opportunity to explore how other organisations are dealing with similar challenges.
- 6.3 We recognise the need to continue to contribute to the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network. It is important to note that the SPSO works with this forum to provide support and to assist with the implementation of quality assurance and benchmarking protocols across all local authorities. We will apply and adhere to any resulting good practice, guidance and recommendations carried out as appropriate whether this is by any necessary system changes, management briefings and or training.

## 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 2015 year. A number of improvement initiatives were identified, with 7 actions identified as high priority and an update on these actions is given below.

	Action	Comment
1	Appropriate security levels (sensitive information) and closed queues to be implemented in the new CRM system.	Addressed through the implementation of our new CRM system which went live on 26 May 2016.  Now complete
2	Create a quality checking process	Template letters have been developed and will be integrated into our new CRM system to support consistent quality responses to customers to be completed by July 2016.

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3	Full range of SPSO, cost and benchmarking indicators to be investigated and developed and used internally, including quality indicators	SPSO have put similar authorities into family groups to take forward the benchmarking process.
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	Quality standards have been developed and matched against Highland Council core values. Implementation will be complete by September 2016.
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

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

There is a significant risk in the Council's 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.

### 8.3 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**

**9. Recommendation**

Members are requested to note:

- The 6 month and annual performance for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints
- The benchmarking and activity of the Ombudsman and Improvement Service.
- The PSIF actions that have been undertaken and the ongoing work to ensure improvement.

Designation: Michelle Morris, Depute Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Development

Date: 1.06.16

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