

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Report No</b>	<b>AS/20/19</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Audit & Scrutiny

**Date:** 28 November 2019

**Report Title:** **Corporate Complaints Performance Monitoring**

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This performance report provides information relating to complaints for the period 1st April to 30th September 2019 along with comparative data for the previous two years. A high level analysis of each Service's performance is also provided.
- 1.2 Corporately, there has been a +7% improvement in the number of complaints managed at frontline resolution within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) with the majority of complaints continuing to be resolved at frontline resolution. Performance relating to those complaints involving an investigation, where the SPSO target is 20 working days, has remained static at 65% when compared with the same time period in 2018/19.
- 1.3 These levels of performance have been achieved during a period when the volume of complaints received by the Council increased by +17.34% when compared with the same period in 2018/19. Complaint volumes remain a very small proportion of Council reported business at <1% and is in line with previous years.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are invited to:
  - i. Scrutinise the Council's 6-monthly performance for Frontline (5 days) and Investigation (10 days) complaints;
  - ii. Reflect on the continued improvement in performance at Frontline and the sustained performance for Investigation against a backdrop of a 17.34% increase in the volume of complaints received ; and
  - iii. Note the number of complaints continues to be a low volume (<1%) within

the context of the scale of the Council's customer base and the scope of services provided.

### **3. Implications**

- 3.1 Resource: All Services have arrangements in place to ensure that the necessary resources are available to prioritise complaints with the aim of achieving statutory and internal targets.
- 3.2 Legal: The Council participates in the benchmarking undertaken in partnership with the SPSO and the Council's complaint process is fully compliant with the SPSO's statutory requirements.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): No known implications.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: 70% of complaints are submitted electronically via the website or by email enabling responses to be provided in the same format, thus reducing the carbon footprint.
- 3.5 Risk: Complaints management is a critical component of the Council's overall approach to customer engagement. This includes leading the various changes required to support the Council's strategic focus to manage reducing resources.
- 3.6 Gaelic: No known implications

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 All Scottish Councils operate a complaint process which provides for complaints to be considered as Frontline resolution (Frontline- normally less complex) and where an Investigation is required (Investigation - complex cases). This mandatory complaint process is defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and clearly sets out that complaints are to be properly categorised from the outset. It is important to note that a complaint should not necessarily be considered at Frontline resolution before progressing to Investigation; the complaint should be appropriately categorised upon receipt. Accordingly, when a complaint is received, Services diagnose it in accordance with the SPSO's framework and, having assessed the complexity and nature of the complaint, categorise it either Frontline or Investigation.
- 4.2 The Highland Council's published definition of a complaint is: *'A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about one of our services that requires a response.'*
- 4.3 The SPSO has issued local authorities with 8 performance indicators which are now reported on a quarterly basis to the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) for benchmarking. These indicators are detailed at Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.4 The SPSO also requires local authorities to publish an annual performance report. The Highland Council is awaiting performance information relating to its family group and will publish the annual report once this comparative information is made available via LACHN.

### **5. Service Delivery Model**

- 5.1 Executive Chief Officers are responsible for managing the performance of complaints

for their respective Service and each Service has a Complaint Co-ordinator who engages with their respective Heads of Service and Managers so that complaints are allocated, prioritised and resolved appropriately.

- 5.2 All Complaint Co-ordinators are members of the Corporate Complaints Improvement Group and continue to identify new ways of working, streamlined processes and continuous improvement. Led by the Acting Head of Revenues and Customer Services, the remit of this group is:

*“To proactively share leading practice and lessons learned in order to consistently achieve quality and timely responses across all Services within the Council. Group members will develop and monitor meaningful key performance indicators that support managers and complaints officers to continuously improve and deliver quality services for customers. The working group will benchmark Highland Council complaints performance internally and within the context of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman’s requirements and associated guidance.”*

## 6. Corporate Performance

- 6.1 For the 6-month period to 30th September 2019, the Council received a total of 927 complaints (790 Qs 1 and 2 2018/19) which is a 17.34% increase on the previous year (Tables 1 and 2 refer).

- 6.2 Table 1 below provides a breakdown of the number of complaints received per Service in Quarters 1 and 2 with comparative data (where available) to the same periods from 2016/17 onwards.

<b>Table 1: Complaints by Service (Quarters 1 and 2)</b>				
<b>Service</b>	<b>16/17</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>
Community Services	665	681	547	590
Care & Learning	64	54	49	99
Chief Executive’s	8	4	9	17
Corporate Resources	N/A	N/A	103	139
Development & Infrastructure	59	60	68	62
Finance	56	118	N/A	N/A
Corporate Development	53	51	N/A	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>968</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>907</b>

N/A – Council/Service restructuring in 2017 means that some direct comparisons are not available.

- 6.3 When complaints are received, the validation process will result in one of the following outcomes:

- Accept Complaint
- Re-classify as request for service
- Re-assign complaint to another Service

<b>Table 2: Awaiting Service Validation at time of snapshot</b>				
	<b>16/17</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>
Awaiting Service Validation	40	14	14	20

- 6.4 For the year to date (April to September), customer transactions reported via the

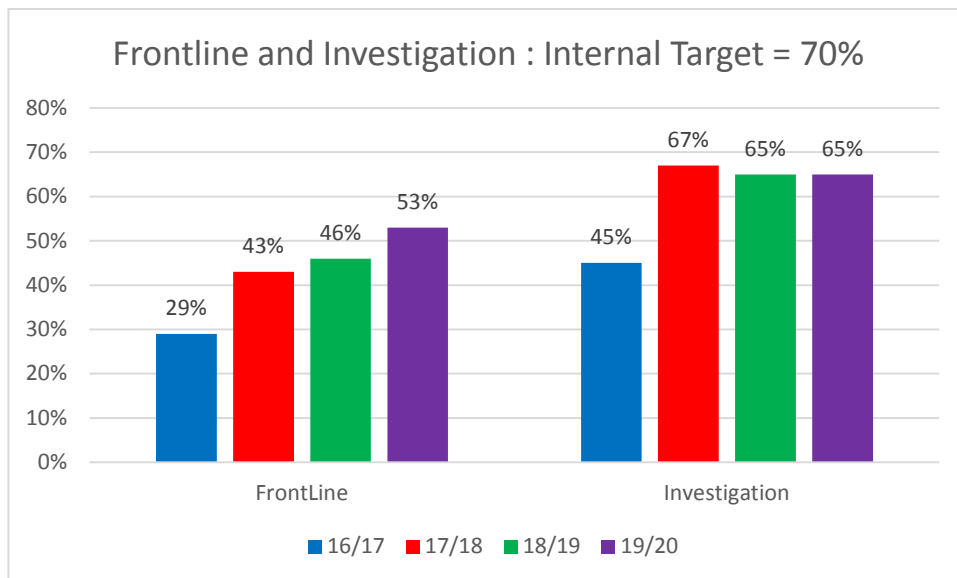
Council's CRM system, across all customer access channels, were 101,929. In line with previous years, 0.9% of contacts were customer complaints.

6.5 Table 3 below shows a very slight increase in digital engagement via the website and by email (70%), when compared with the same period last year (69%). Electronic responses are generally provided to complaints received this way, reducing postage and paper use and thus providing a positive environmental impact.

<b>Table 3: Customer Complaint Channels</b>				
	<b>Qs 1 and 2 2016/17</b>	<b>Qs 1 and 2 2017/18</b>	<b>Qs 1 and 2 2018/19</b>	<b>Qs 1 and 2 2019/20</b>
By Website	60.5%	60.2%	63%	61%
By Telephone	20.3%	24.3%	21%	22%
By Email	6.7%	5.5%	6%	9%
In person	7.5%	3.7%	5%	5%
By Letter	4.8%	6.3%	5%	3%
By Appointment	0.2%	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%

6.6 The graph provided at paragraph 6.7 below demonstrates the overall improving trend across the Council to achieve the internal 70% target for resolving complaints at Frontline and Investigation. Within the context that the number of complaints received has increased by 17.34%, a 7% improvement has been achieved at Frontline (5 working day target), and Investigation performance has been maintained at the same level as Quarters 1 and 2 for 2018/19.

6.7 Frontline and Investigation performance measured against the internal target of 70%



## 7. Performance per Service

7.1 Detailed information per Service around compliance within set timescales at both Frontline and Investigation is available below. This includes information on the average time in working days taken at both Frontline and Investigation for complaint resolution.

**Table 4: Performance Against Timescales by Service – Frontline**

The number and percentage of Frontline complaints that were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days.

Service	Total Number of Frontline cases closed	Number closed within 5 working days	% closed within 5 working days	Average working days to close
Community Services	398 (481)	159 (192)	40% (40%)	13 (12)
Care & Learning	59 (31)	27 (16)	46% (52%)	16 (13)
Chief Executive's	12 (4)	8 (3)	67% (75%)	15 (6)
Corporate Resources	112 (90)	88 (60)	79% (67%)	4 (7)
Development & Infrastructure	30 (31)	22 (21)	73% (68%)	4 (5)

NB Figures in () is the comparative data for the equivalent time period in 2018/19.

- 7.2 Corporate Resources and Development & Infrastructure have exceeded the 70% internal target of 5 working days for Frontline complaints.
- 7.3 Some complaints are dealt with by Services and Schools in real-time and are therefore not recorded in CRM. As a result these real-time resolutions are not reflected within this report and would otherwise improve the reported performance for Services.

**Table 5: Performance Against Timescales by Service – Investigation**

The number and percentage of Investigation complaints that were closed in full within the set timescales of 20 working days.

Service	Total Number of Investigation cases closed	Number closed within 20 working days	% closed within 20 working days	Average working days to close
Community Services	78 (37)	46 (25)	59% (68%)	22 (18)
Care & Learning	28 (18)	11 (8)	39% (44%)	27 (21)
Chief Executive's	4 (4)	2 (2)	50% (50%)	15 (24)
Corporate Resources	25 (13)	23 (12)	92% (92%)	7 (12)
Development & Infrastructure	26 (36)	22 (23)	85% (64%)	16 (17)

NB Figures in () is the comparative data for the equivalent time period in 2018/19.

- 7.4 Corporate performance at Investigation has been maintained with the majority of Services either close to or well below 20 days. For some Services, the volumes of Investigation complaints are relatively low and as a result a small number of responses

that are out with the 20 working days can have a disproportionate impact on reported performance. Some complaints are both sensitive and complex and require in excess of 20 days to investigate which is reflected in the reported performance in Table 5.

- 7.5 The Corporate Complaints Improvement Group will continue to take forward improvement actions to further improve performance within Services and across the Council.

## 8. Complaint Reasons

- 8.1 To drive further improvements around service delivery, it is important to analyse the reasons for customer complaints. Table 6 below sets out the 10 most common reasons why customers complained to the Council during the 6-month period to 30 September 2019 with comparison to the same period in the previous two years.
- 8.2 The information contained within Table 6 is included in the performance monitoring data that is currently shared with Heads of Service and Complaints Co-ordinators so that the root cause of complaints can be explored, lessons are learned, and future performance can be further improved.

Reason	Ranking			No. Complaints Received		
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Council Housing (including allocation of council housing, housing repairs etc.)	1	1	1	186	189	165
Land and Property	10	2	2	32	108	142
Roads and Pavements (Pot holes, Street lighting etc.)	4	3	3	93	87	80
Rubbish and Recycling (Bulky uplift, bins for your home etc.)	2	4	4	160	84	69
Schools (Catering etc.)	7	7	5	42	32	64
Sundry Debt Collection* (Late payment penalties etc.)	*	*	6	*	*	62
Council Tax (Billing, Payments etc.)	3	5	7	98	75	57
Planning and Building Control (Planning permission, Pre-planning Advice, etc.)	6	6	8	52	52	45
Improvement Repairs (Housing)*	*	*	9	*	8	20
Parking and Car Parks	8	8	10	39	25	18

\*Not within the 10 most common reasons for 2018/19

NB 1 equals the largest volume of complaints and is based on six months' data

- 8.3 The top 4 reasons for complaints have remained the same as 2018/19 albeit with a decrease in volume except from Land and Property. Further investigation shows that Land and Property reasons can be attributed to grass cutting and public conveniences.
- 8.4 The reasons for complaints can be influenced by seasonal activity, including grass cutting or gritting and by new initiatives, policy decisions and legislative changes.

## 9. Benchmarking Performance

- 9.1 The Highland Council continues to participate in quarterly meetings of the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) which operates in partnership with the SPSO. A key outcome of this group has been the development of benchmarking family groups. Highland's family group includes the following Councils: Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Scottish Borders, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway and Aberdeenshire. Benchmarking data is based on the 8 performance indicators as detailed at Appendix 1 to this report.
- 9.2 While this is a valuable exercise there are some key differences that can impact on results. For example not all local authorities have retained their housing stock and some regard a first missed bin as a complaint whereas other local authorities treat such contacts as a request for service.
- 9.3 At the time of writing this report, comparable data for the family group was not available in respect of the first 6 months to 30 September 2019. As a result, while the Council has made further improvements during Quarters 1 and 2 of the current financial year when compared with the annual performance for 2018/19, it is not currently possible to benchmark this year's performance within the family group.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance

Date: 28 November 2019

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Background Papers: Audit and Scrutiny Committee papers June 2019 and November 2018

**Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)  
Annual Performance Indicators**

1.	The total number of complaints received per thousand of population.
2.	Complaints closed at Frontline and Investigation as a percentage of all complaints closed.
3.	The number of complaints upheld or partially upheld/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 up to 20 day timelines has been authorised.
7.	Customer Satisfaction Survey.
8.	Outlining improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints.