

The Highland Council

Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 24 November 2016

Agenda Item	7
Report No	AS/23/16

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 1st April 2016 to 30th September 2016 along with comparative data and includes a high level analysis of our complaint handling per service.

1. Background

- 1.1 All Scottish local government authorities now operate a 2 stage complaints handling procedure. This mandatory complaints process, defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) put in place a series of 8 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 Council continues to resolve the majority of complaints at the initial stage of the procedure, with a target resolution timescale of 5 working days. From 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016, there were a total of 945 complaints handled. There were 673 complaints handled as Stage 1 with 193 (28.7%) closed within Service Level Agreement (SLA). During this period there were also 93 Stage 2 complaints with 42 (45.2%) closed within SLA.
- 2.2 Comparison of performance data on these indicators has been carried out to help us identify and scrutinise peaks and troughs in performance. While there has been an increase in the number of complaints received from the period 1 October 2015 to 31 March 2016 (152) the volume of complaints handled is in line with that handled for the same period last year (912) and this highlights that there can be significant seasonal variations around complaints.
- 2.3 There have been a number of factors that have influenced performance during the last 6 months. As previously reported there was the potential for significant VR related staffing changes to impact on officer numbers which has meant

that resources have become stretched. A new CRM system was also implemented in May 2016 and while training and support for dedicated complaints staff was prioritised it was understood that time would be required for staff to become familiar with this new system. This has contributed to an increase in the number of days taken to resolve complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2. In some services, backlogs of complaints have occurred and have had to be cleared.

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	499	121	24%
Finance	53	15	28%
Care & Learning	43	21	49%
Corporate Development	40	18	45%
Development & Infrastructure	30	15	50%
Chief Executive's	7	2	29%
No Service Allocated	1	1	100%
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	37	15	41%
Development & Infrastructure	27	15	56%
Care & Learning	17	5	29%
Corporate Development	8	3	38%
Finance	3	3	100%
Chief Executive's	1	1	100%
No Service Allocated	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 A considerable amount of work has gone into ensuring that all complaints are now allocated to a service. This has meant a reduction in the complaints recorded as “no service allocated” and also ensures that a responsible officer can take ownership quickly to resolve complaints.

3.3 Community Services as one of our main customer facing services receives the largest number of complaints. As previously reported a number of targeted initiatives have been undertaken with Customer Services to increase resolution at first point of contact and focus in on quality. This means that majority of complaints are recorded and resolved at Stage 1 and there has been a corresponding drop in the number of complaints allocated to Stage 2.

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 – April 2016 to 30 September 2016

Rank	Subject
1	Housing Repairs
2	Road Maintenance
3	Antisocial Behaviour
4	Staff Behaviour
5	Parking
6	Progress Chasing
7	Previous Complaint
8	Planning Applications
9	Missed Bins
10	Council Tax

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.

5. Ombudsman Update

5.1 The Highland Council have submitted our latest annual performance figures for the period (1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016) 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 similar local authorities.

5.2 Customer Services recognises the importance of continuing to contribute to the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network. The network works with the Improvement Service which is currently in the process of analysing councils' annual complaints performance reports for the year 2015-16 with a view to completing a sector report. They will look to work with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network to identify further opportunities to benchmark for improvement and the work to develop the new social work complaints

procedure. A revised programme of activities will be considered including ways in which to improve learning from complaints, and the value that can be added by applying SPSO's Complaints Improvement Framework to identify opportunities for improvement.

6. Complaints Improvement Framework

- 6.1 An assessment of our Corporate Complaints using the Public Sector Improvement Framework (PSIF) took place from March to June 2015. A number of improvement initiatives were identified and actions are now complete.
- 6.2 The SPSO recognises the challenges facing all local authorities around delivering positive results around complaints. The SPSO has been working on a Complaints Improvement Framework which is to help organisations assess the efficiency and effectiveness of their overall complaints handling arrangements. This will look at how well the organisation handles and responds to complaints, how accessible the complaints procedure is and the effectiveness of its governance and monitoring arrangements. Highland Council will participate in the framework and adopt any recommendations and actions that result.

7. Implications.

7.1 Resource Implications

There are limited resource implications against any actions from the SPSO Complaints Improvement Framework. 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.

- 7.2 **Risks** There may continue to be an increase in complaints at a time when there is a reduction in resource available to handle complaints.

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. 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.

7.3 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

8. 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 SPSO Complaints Improvement Framework work that is being undertaken.

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

Date: 14.11.16

Author: Tina Page, Customer Services Manager