

Note of the Senior Management Group Meeting held on 5 October 2012

Present:

Jim Martin	Ombudsman (Chair)
Niki Maclean	Director
Emma Gray	Head of Policy and External Communications
Paul McFadden	Head of Complaints Standards

In attendance:

Fiona Paterson	Senior Personal Assistant (Secretary)
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Invitees:

Carol Neil	Advice Team Manager
Kathleen Steindl	Early Resolution Manager
Judy Saddler	Investigations Manager

1. The meeting opened at 10:00 with no apologies.
2. The note of the meeting held on 5 September 2012 was agreed with minor amendments. There were no outstanding actions for review.

3. Policy Group Update

The Group were updated on progress made against Q2 business plan objectives for policy, CSA, communications and training.

Action 1: *The Group requested further discussion regarding the availability of the researcher to undertake an impact study before the end of March due to funding restricting for this work after this date.*

The Group were updated on the almost universal compliance by local authorities to the model CHP and informed that this information would be provided to Audit Scotland in accordance with the CSA's monitoring process.

The first network meetings for two sectors were well attended and well run by individuals from each sector. The Group discussed options for the annual Local Government network event which will be held in the new financial year, with stronger links to CSA following the roll-out of the model complaints handling process.

The Group were updated on SQA developments following recent meetings.

The Group approved the reviewed Media Policy and new Twitter Policy for circulation to all staff.

4. Casework Performance Update

The Group noted the casework performance for September and the upcoming resourcing changes to the complaint handling teams.

Advice Team

Carol Neill, Advice Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide an update on her area of the organisation. CN provided information on outcomes from her recent team away-day and additional research her team will be undertaking to confirm anecdotal evidence of complaint types received. The Group discussed with CN the duty CR position in the team and how it was operating.

The Ombudsman thanked CN for providing the update to the senior management team. CN welcomed coming to the meeting to provide a report on her team.

Early Resolution Team

Kathleen Steindl, Early Resolution Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide an update on her area of the organisation. KS described the last quarter as challenging and set out the reasons for this but confirmed the recent recruitment drive will assist with some of these factors.

KS outlined potential future initiatives including:-

- i) building in more flexibility to assist with the allocation of cases through her team;
- ii) early case assessment by a small dedicated team;
- iii) dedicating a day a week when the whole team focuses on issuing decision letters.

KS is focussing on driving down case numbers to allow some space in the team to work on these new initiatives.

The Group asked how they could support the work in the ER team. KS noted four specific areas as follows:

- i) supporting ER to make more proportionate decisions on 'complaint handling' complaints
- ii) reconsidering the time-bar guidance to ensure the value of taking the complaint forward is clear
- iii) consider giving further strategic direction in relation to the proportionality, value and outcome of taking complaints forwards
- iv) providing ER cover in KS's absence

KS summarised that in general the new process is working well but there were further opportunities to resolve more cases earlier in the process.

Investigations Team

Judy Saddler, Investigations Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide an update on her area of the organisation. JS supplied the team statistics for the past quarter and noted their strong performance. JS noted to the Group that she understands the need to do more with less and will work with the resource available to meet the organisation's performance targets. The Group asked what the key messages JS would recommend coming from the SMT. JS noted it would be helpful for the SMT to publicly recognise that the organisation was stretched in all areas, but performing well. JS suggested that interviewing the body complained about during the investigation may reduce the challenges to recommendations and improve the quality of the decision making.

5. Corporate Services Update

The Group noted the progress against the business plan and operational plans for the second quarter, and considered the key points raised. There were no changes required to the risk register

The meeting closed at 11:45