

Note of the Senior Management Team Meeting held on Thursday 9 October 2014

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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Observer:

Kieran FitzGerald	Garda Ombudsman Commission
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1. The meeting opened at 14:00 with apologies from Rachel Nicholson, Executive Casework Officer. The Ombudsman welcomed Kieran FitzGerald, the Garda Ombudsman, to the meeting and Mr FitzGerald noted his thanks for the kind invitation to observe the SPSO SMT meeting.
2. The note of the meeting held on 9 September 2014 was agreed with a minor amendment and the outstanding actions list was reviewed. The SMT noted all but one of the actions were on target for completion by the due dates, and that due to limited resources, one action will be postponed until the new business year.

3. Team Managers' Updates

Investigations Team

Judy Saddler, Investigations Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide an update on her area of the organisation for Q2. JS reflected on the team's statistics and noted that they were in a better place this quarter with improved closure rates, possibly due to the reduced transfer rate which has helped greatly. The transfer process will revert to normal in Q3 and will be monitored closely. JS reported that the morale in the team was good as the team members enjoy the type of work they are doing, but caseloads have a great influence on stress levels and these have noticeably fluctuated during the last six months as caseloads rose and fell. Holding bays operated by individual staff differ, but the average is 2-3 months from receipt of case.

Emerging issues from casework were noted for three bodies under jurisdiction and these were discussed in detail by the group. The current requirement for additional planning advice was discussed, and it was noted this was creating a delay in progressing these cases. JS shared that the team had introduced an initiative to identify earlier in the process any case that may be suitable for public reporting. JS is also sampling cases to see if the complexity of investigation cases has increased as suspected. This sample research will be based on the number of heads of complaint, the number of recommendations, the number of pages in the decision letter and the number of pieces of advice required.

The Ombudsman thanked JS for providing the update to the senior management team.

Early Resolution Team

Kathleen Steindl, Early Resolution Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide a Q2 update on her area of the organisation. KS highlighted that a major focus for her role involved anticipating, allocating and moving through the process large volumes of cases. This month

saw the first change-over of DCR personnel which has highlighted some points for consideration. Sickness and leave issues were prominent for the team in Q2. Despite this, performance continued to be high this quarter, including transfers being made earlier and mostly under KPI.

KS shared excellent examples of case-handling and resolutions achieved for complainants by the team. Emerging issues were discussed in detail and action to address some of the problems were identified.

KS noted that there was visible evidence of pressure building up in the team, including work being produced whilst a CR is on leave, and a feeling of silo-ing between the teams creating a feeling of them-and-us culture. Team members had noted to her that there was no more capacity within the team should the push required in Q4 last year be asked for again. KS has reassured the team that this would not be the case due to process improvements that have now been embedded in the team and the greatly improved performance.

The Ombudsman thanked KS for providing the update to the senior management team.

Advice Team

Carol Neill, Advice Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide a Q2 update on her area of the organisation. CN noted that incoming complaints were very high until mid-September when there has been a sudden drop in cases received. This had also been noted in other similar organisations in Scotland. The DCR position continues to work very well within the team, and the first changeover of personnel went very smoothly. CN shared the recent front office experience of calls from a prison.

CN recently worked with the Gibraltar Ombudsman and shared with them our experience of prison complaints on her recent visit. CN updated the SMT on the results of the BUJ compliance monitoring her had undertaken and shared very interesting statistics on each sector. CN provided an update from the OA First Contact meeting which had presentations on 'unconscious bias' and 'reasonable adjustments', which will help to improve the Advice Team work.

4. Financial Monitoring Report

The financial report will be tabled directly with the AAC on 21 October. There were no specific actions to report.

5. Risk Management Report

(i) Internal Audit Report – Risk Management

The SMT were pleased to note the draft report with an overall assessment of 'good'. The SMT discussed the proposed management responses to the recommendations.

(ii) Risk Register

The SMT reviewed the 2014-15 Risk Register with a particular focus on mitigation actions and scores. No changes were made. The SMT agreed the risk for the risk interrogation report for the AAC meeting.

6. Performance Report – Corporate Services

The SMT approved the SPSO Records Management Plan and Policy, and noted the plan was ready for submission to the Keeper in December.

The SMT approved the recommended processes for progressing the retention disposal of CLAS documents stored by NRS.

The Ombudsman requested amendments to the draft MoU with the NRS before the document is finalised for signing. This will be taken forward by FP.

The SMT noted the quarterly performance against the business plan measures for tabling to the AAC.

The SMT noted the 2014-15 strategic plan incorporating actions from the staff survey and IIP report.

The SMT approved the proposed recommendations to facilitate GSI emailing from WorkPro.

7. Performance Report – Casework

The SMT discussed the casework performance for September and year-to-date.

8. Performance Report – Policy Group

The SMT noted the paper for tabling at the AAC meeting.

9. Service Improvement Report

The SMT noted the Organisational Learning report for Q2 and approved it for publication.

The meeting closed at 16:30