

Note of the Senior Management Team Meeting held on Thursday 2 July 2015

Present:

Jim Martin	Ombudsman (Chair)
Niki Maclean	Director
Paul McFadden	Head of Complaints Standards

In attendance:

Rachel Nicholson	Executive Casework Officer
Fiona Paterson	Senior Personal Assistant (Secretary)

1. The meeting opened at 15:00 with apologies from Emma Gray, Head of Policy and External Communications.
2. The note of the meeting held on 20 May 2015 was agreed with minor amendments and the outstanding actions list was reviewed.

3. Team Managers' Updates

Advice Team

Carol Neill, Advice Team Manager, was invited to the meeting to provide a Q1 update on her area of the organisation. CN shared with the SMT three examples of Advice calls where a difference was made:

- one where a BUJ had wrongly signposted a caller in difficult circumstances to our office with real financial implications to the caller;
- one where support was provided to a complainant in difficult circumstances who had been facing major delays and false promises from a BUJ following the death of her husband; and
- one where appropriate adjustments to our internal process was made to help support a caller.

On the second call, CN advised the CSA team of the poor complaint-handling performance of the BUJ and noted the quick and effective response of the CSA team to assist the BUJ to understand the impact on the complainant and improvements they could make.

CN informed the SMT that her team welcomed the suggestion for a BUJ tracker where they could provide this information more formally.

The Ombudsman thanked CN 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 Q1 update on her area of the organisation. KS highlighted the strong performance for the second half of Q1 following a very difficult start. The introduction of the closely managed holding-bay in mid-quarter is providing more manager control over allocation to CR workloads; leading to greater productivity through more efficient case handling indicated by the drop in number of cases open in the team; and better team morale. In addition, IPA resources are being accessed to review holding-bay cases and identify those cases requiring more urgent attention. The close management of these cases is ensuring the complainants are fully informed of the timescales for their case. Other initiatives to assist with the clearing of cases include 'quiet

mornings' for drafting of decision letters, and the opportunity to work from home when intense reading of case files is required.

KS shared emerging issues including planning issues in one Council and the lack of resources in Councils and HAs to implement approved adaptations.

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

4. Financial Monitoring Report

The SMT noted the year-to-date financial expenditure against budget for 2015-16, including the predicted overspend of £79k for unbudgeted liabilities. The SMT noted the year-on-year major contract variance and were pleased to see the significant savings made through close monitoring of facilities contracts and expenditure.

The SMT approved the draft 2014-15 Annual Accounts for submission to the external auditors with the working papers.

5. Risk Register 2015-16

The SMT reviewed the risk register for Q1 and discussed in detail risk 1.1 relating to the impact of an increase in complaints received. The SMT also discussed what other risks there may be for the coming year that would require noting in the register, and agreed that the risks held within the register covered the major scenarios for the 2015-16 business year.

The SMT were informed that Internal Audit of risk management would be undertaken in June using the Audit Scotland Best Value Toolkit.

6. Performance Report – Corporate Services

The SMT noted the draft Business Plan for 2015-16 for final review before publication. The SMT noted the Q1 review of performance measures.

The SMT discussed in detail the project looking at the bulk sharing of complaint information with BUJs and the impact on working practices. The SMT were also informed of a resignation notice received recently.

7. Performance Report – Casework

The SMT noted the Q1 statistics against projections and requested a comparison for the previous three years. Although the total number of cases received in Q1 did not show the predicted increase, the number of cases fit for SPSO investigation did rise. This will be tracked closely by the management team.

8. Performance Report – Policy Group

The SMT noted the update on activities in the policy, external communications, CSA and training areas of the business.

9. Performance Report – Service Improvement

The SMT noted the report, including the Q4 quality assurance reports for casework and advice. The SMT were informed of the QA process changes for Q2; and noted the two cases on which the decisions have been changed following review this year to date.

The meeting closed at 16:30

Decisions taken outside the recorded meeting:

1. The SMT approved the immediate change to the Privacy Notice on our website, and the incremental changes to the notice on our leaflets as and when appropriate following the ICO suggestion that we clarify to our complainants what additional activities we may use the information they provide for our investigations, such as research.
2. The SMT approved to no longer withhold our identity/number when making outgoing calls as we now provided direct dial numbers to complainants on our correspondence, therefore, this is now an outdated precaution.
3. Two Comms contracts were due for retender at the beginning of the year – Graphic Design and Web support. The SMT agreed in principle to postponing the tender process for these contracts for 6 months.