

Note of the Senior Management Team Meeting held on Tuesday 12 January 2017

Present:

Jim Martin	Ombudsman (Chair)
Niki Maclean	Director
Emma Gray	Head of Communications and Engagement
John Stevenson	Head of Complaints Standards

In attendance:

Fiona Paterson	Senior Personal Assistant (Secretary)
Jamie McGrandles	Executive Casework Officer

Apologies:

None

1. The meeting opened at 11:00 with no apologies. The note of the meeting held on Tuesday 25 October 2016 was approved for publication with minor amendments. The actions held over from previous meetings, including AAC, internal audit and external audit, were reviewed and progress noted.

2. Financial Monitoring Report

The SMT reviewed the current expenditure against budget and noted that we will be drawing down our full budget of £3,359,828, which includes the £107k contingency funding for the Learning and Improvement Unit. At this stage we don't expect to be drawing on any further contingency funds, as previously identified, but should be able to absorb these unbudgeted liabilities into the approved budget. The Director confirmed that any surplus may be managed towards an overtime initiative for casework in quarter four.

3. Performance report

The SMT were updated on significant actions undertaken since the previous update. In particular, the following was noted:

SO1: Complaints and investigations

Team managers' updates:

Advice Team: Carol Neil, Advice Team Manager, and Laura Carswell, Advice Officer, updated the meeting on the follow-up review of the three-month prematurity study and tabled a paper with the findings. CN went on to note the increased use of the online complaint form, alongside the electronic submission of evidence from complaints, and proposed extending the 'electronic only' files to all those at Advice stage that are submitted in this format. The SMT supported this proposal. CN noted that recruitment and induction will be her priority for the start of 2017.

Early Resolution Team: Kathleen Steindl, Early Resolution Team Manager, and George Hunter, Assistant Manager, informed the meeting that the holding bay had significantly reduced since October. In addition to this for the coming quarter, the team will turn its attention to clearing the older cases. The other areas of focus will be to welcome and induct the new

members of the team and bed in the new Activity Level arrangements for the complaint handling process; and prepare for Social Work complaints.

Investigations Team: Judy Saddler, Investigations Team Manager, informed the meeting of a significant improvement in the inactivity measure on cases within her team due to the reduction of the open caseload. In addition, JS discussed with the SMT the number of public reports that will be laid for this year and the increase in complex investigations in the higher education sector. Following this discussion the SMT agreed to separate the further education and higher education sectors for reporting from 1 April 2017.

Director's overview: The Director informed the SMT that the focus for the teams in Q4 will be on increasing investigation case closures.

The SMT noted the QA final report for Q1 2016-17.

SO2: Scottish Welfare Fund

Alison Jack, Scottish Welfare Fund Team Manager, informed the meeting that the customer survey will be extended to the SWF cases in the near future. She also shared that the first interview on a case was undertaken in Q3. The Ombudsman expressed his thanks and appreciation for the work done over the office closure period, which ensured the service was maintained.

SO3: Simplification

The SMT were updated on the preparation for receiving social work complaints. Professional Advisers are currently being sourced, and the Scottish Social Services Council has been approached to provide training for staff.

SO4: Good Practice

The new CSA officer will represent SPSO on a short-life benchmarking workgroup for the Local Government Complaints Handlers Network.

SO5: Accountability and Best Value

Business planning for 2017-18 is underway with the draft Business Plan and Risk Register to be tabled for the SMT at the February meeting. The SMT agreed to the recommendations that Social Work complaints will be electronic files only and to implement the move to electronic files for the Scottish Prison Service complaints, as a progression of the paper-lite project. These actions will be incorporated into the business plan. In preparation for the EU data protection reform, the Ombudsman suggested considering an internal audit review of our current processes to inform us of what actions we need to take.

SO6: Engagement, learning and improvement

The SMT agreed the recommendation to incorporate the Valuing Complaints website into the main SPSO website. The SMT noted the first report on responses to the authority survey.

The meeting closed at 13:45