Feedback Report
Investors in People

Scottish Public Services
Ombudsman

Undertaken by: Raymond Boland
On behalf of Investors in People Scotland

Project Reference Number: 16/2288

Date: 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 2017
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1. Introduction

The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman is the final stage for complaints made against public service providers including councils, the NHS, housing associations, colleges and universities, prisons, most water providers, the Scottish Government, its agencies and departments and most Scottish Authorities.

Two key changes that have place within the SPSO since the last IIP assessment visit are the setting up of a new unit to support authorities in learning from complaints and to help them prevent repeat failings and bring about long-lasting improvement. Additionally, since April 2016, a Scottish Welfare Fund Team has been added to the SPSO with responsibilities for reviewing complaints against decisions made by local authorities concerning crisis and community care grants and have the power to reverse decisions made by the authorities. The team require specialised skills and knowledge and, as a result, most of the members were recruited externally.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has been recognised as an Investor in People since 15\textsuperscript{th} March 2011 and completed a successful review on 12th March 2014. This current review was completed on 22\textsuperscript{nd} February 2017 and was the first assessment against the Investors in People 6\textsuperscript{th} Generation Framework. The next full review will be due to be completed by 15\textsuperscript{th} March 2020.

2. Methodology

While it is strongly recommended that organisations undertake the IIP Online Assessment to maximise the overall views of people, the SPSO had recently undertaken their own staff survey at the time of this assessment with many of the questions matching the Online Assessment. As a result it was felt it would not be beneficial to hold the Online Assessment so close to the organisation's own survey.

At the time of this assessment visit the SPSO had a total of 62 people in scope and I selected a sample of 16 people for involvement in the interviews. The sample was a representation of 26\% of all in scope and was made to make sure there was suitable representation across all services and to comply with the required sample size when an organisation does not undertake the IIP Online Assessment. In selecting the sample I ensured the range of people I selected closely matched the overall make-up of the organisation with consideration to job title, service, male / female numbers, full and part-time staff, length of service and to include trade union representation.

All interviews were conducted one-to-one and face-to-face with approximately one hour allocated for each interview to allow some time to reflect on the information that came from the discussions. The interviews were held in a private room to ensure total confidentiality.

In preparing for my visit I had context meetings with Nicola Maclean, Director and Helen Wilson, HR Officer. I reviewed the Business Objectives & Performance Measures 2016 - 2017, the Annual Report and web-site and observed operations within the offices. I also reviewed my previous Investors in People report and the assessment outcomes and received a summary of the SPSO staff survey outcomes.
3. Summary Findings

- You have a clear commitment to being open and transparent with clarity of purpose, aims and objectives that are clearly understood by people at all levels across the organisation and this has contributed to people’s views the SPSO is a great place to work. All staff meetings, management meetings, team meetings and one-to-one meetings all keep people focused on the aims and objectives of the organisation and their contributions towards them. While people confirmed that the actions take place and demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose, aims and objectives there were some views all staff meetings could be more disciplined with regard to time management of activities, that there could be greater consistency in cascading information from senior management to teams and also with regard to recognition of high performance.

- The leadership and management style is in the form of a coaching role and I found senior management to be considered role models for good leadership practice, demonstrating the values and in demonstrating effective teamwork. While people also consider first line managers to be effective through being open, approachable and supportive there were some views good practice could be more consistent. As the approach to leadership is now that of coaching there may be an opportunity to deliver a short refresher programme on the key components of coaching. There were some views, as stated above, there could be greater consistency in cascading information from

- As the SPSO had conducted its own employee survey it was felt that the IIP Online Assessment would be a duplication of effort, and as a result, it was agreed not to proceed with the Online Assessment at this time.

- I was located in the main office area and able to observe the office environment as well as having some informal discussions with people.

- I had a desktop review of relevant documentation including the aims and objectives of the SPSO, the Annual Report and survey outcomes.

- I discussed the range of internal and external performance measures.
senior management to team members and that some managers could be more effective in recognising high performance by individuals and teams. There was also a minority view that senior managers could be more visible and this could be as a result of missed quarterly all staff meetings or as a result of senior management unavailability to attend some of the meetings. I suggest that when the refreshed vision, values (and behaviours) have been approved that you clarify what people can expect from their managers in the way of a management charter.

- While you have a clear vision with seven values and behaviours that come from the competences you have in place you have established a vision and values team to review and refresh them. People explained that all have had the opportunity to consider the vision and values and this has raised awareness to the importance of them.

- While the refreshed vision and values are at the final stages of preparation they have still to be formally approved prior to implementation. There is an opportunity to more formally align the behaviours people should demonstrate to the vision and values and to review the performance of managers and staff in relation to them at their professional development programme discussions and follow-up review sessions.

- The structure of the SPSO has been reviewed to take into account the new services and to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of all services provided. People have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the structure through job descriptions, person specifications and through objectives agreed at their professional development programme discussions.

- The wide range of activities that engage staff directly or through representative structures have ensured all have an awareness of business and team plans and their contributions towards them and, as a result, there is a clear focus on continuous improvement at all levels.

- Senior management communicate future priorities and plans in relation to them at all staff meetings, through the cascading of information and at Tuesday morning sessions. As stated above, while the levels of communication and engagement are high there is an opportunity to review the consistency in cascading information from senior management to teams.

- Key stakeholders to the SPSO services are the Scottish Government, public service providers and customers with their needs and expectations taken into consideration in business planning.

- There is a high level of empowerment with managers and staff considering it necessary to effectively deliver the services. I found staff to be motivated by the trust managers have in them to make decisions and views were expressed that when mistakes do happen they are treated as a learning experience. People were of the view that when required managers, peers and the availability of policies and procedures are all a means of support.

- You have a robust approach to recruitment and selection with selection being based on the demonstrated capability for the post and I found people to be satisfied with the overall management of the activity.
There is clear encouragement for people to seek learning and development activities to support their ongoing development and new people confirmed there is an effective induction with the Ombudsman and other senior managers having input. Development takes place through a range of formal and informal activities and a range of internal and external measures allow the impact of the activities on performance to be measured.

You have five commitments to equality and diversity with one being to monitor the diversity of the workforce and supply chain and take positive steps where under-representation exists. People referred to there being and Equalities Officer making sure that equality and diversity is effectively managed and to the range of policies and procedures that break down barriers to recruitment of a diverse workforce demonstrating the values and capabilities required for the post.

While you take action as a socially responsible employer and member of the community there is an opportunity to more visibly promote the community activities.

4. Outcome

Having carried out this assessment in accordance with the guidelines provided by Investors in People Scotland, I am satisfied that you fully meet the requirements of the Investors in People Standard. Additionally, I congratulate you for having achieved the higher level of Gold status.

The full details of the Indicators and Themes met are provided at Appendix 1.

5. Findings and recommendations against business objectives

Objective 1: to be an accountable, best value organisation through managing resources effectively to meet business needs

Leading and Inspiring People

You demonstrate a clear commitment to being open and transparent and through this have developed a range of communication and engagement activities that people appreciate and value. This has resulted in people having respect for management and how the organisation is managed and is also a contributor to people feeling the SPSO is a great place to work.

I have noted through discussions with the sample of people I selected there is an effective relationship with the trade union representative, and volunteer representatives from each service team serve on formal and less formal work groups established to review specific practices and identify where improvements can be achieved. There are senior management and team away days or half days when the business and team plans, aims and objectives are developed. You have a professional development programme with annual one-to-one sessions and a six-month follow-up and my discussions with people highlighted there are regular case reviews and less formal one-to-one discussions on performance. People referred to the quarterly all staff meetings and to the Ombudsman having one-to-one discussions with all people annually. All staff are invited to attend weekly Tuesday morning meetings that serve as updates and also as development sessions.

The ambition of the organisation sets out the mission, vision and strategic objectives for the SPSO. The long term aims and objectives are defined in a four year strategic plan and an annual business plan sets out the short term
aims and objectives. Service operational plans with performance objectives link into the corporate plans and linked objectives for individuals are agreed at their professional development programme discussions.

As a result of the levels of communication and engagement people have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the contributions they make to their teams and the organisation. References were made to internal and externally set objectives and targets, for example, targets set by the Scottish Government. Examples of individual and team objectives and targets were, meeting timescales for processing crisis grants, productivity targets, timescales for response to customer complaints, quality of telephone calls and meeting BSI Standards.

While I found people to value the opportunities they have to be kept informed on organisational performance and developments, I found some views that the all staff meetings could be better structured with regard to time management and there were also views from some people that there is not always a consistency in managers communicating messages from senior managers to their teams. You may wish to consider reviewing managers' performance through the professional development programme to make sure of a consistent approach and to make sure there is consistency in getting key messages across to all people timeously. You may also wish to consider delivering a short development programme as a refresher and with a focus on the key elements of coaching.

“You will have noticed I really like working here” - “communication here is really, really good, I am proud to work here, it is a professional and supportive environment” - “it is a coaching style of leadership, the doors are always open they are very supportive” - there is sometimes a gap in what senior management want to communicate and what is communicated to teams”.

Living the organisation’s values and behaviours

You have put a great deal of effort into reviewing and improving the vision and values and, while the revised vision and values have yet to be 'signed off, I found this has had a very positive outcome with people having a clear belief in them and understanding the importance of them.

In line with your commitment to empowerment and engagement I noted you established vision and values workgroups with representatives from each team across the services involved in reviewing and refreshing the vision and values. The revised vision and values are now at an advanced stage but at the time of this assessment visit, still to be 'signed off’. Until then the organisation continuous to have a clear vision with seven core values that include being courteous, considerate and respectful of people’s rights, providing impartial, fair and expert responses to complaints and being collaborative in work. People were able to refer to them and, as a result of all being engaged in the review of the vision and values, there is an increased energy and enthusiasm with regard to them with an increased understanding of the importance of them to the organisation. I also found some people had considered their own values in relation to them.

While the values have underlying behaviours, competences set out standards and behaviours that people are expected to demonstrate when carrying out their duties.

As I discussed at the feedback meeting, it would be advantageous to review the organisational behaviours to align them to the vision and values and to review manager and staff performance in relation to them through the one-to-one discussions. Reviews will make sure there is a consistent approach across all services.
“The vision and values have been based on generic public service values, they are now to be more reflective of work” - “we all share the values, I find it a really good place to work” - “our values and behaviours include courtesy and respect.

Managing performance

People have a clear understanding of what is expected of them with regard to performance and in discussions there were references to being impartial in reviewing decisions made by Councils, driving up standards of performance, conducting in-depth reviews of complaints and supporting peers with regard to legal positions. The understanding is reinforced through Professional Development Review discussions when feedback is provided against their agreed objectives. The objectives are agreed with line managers and it is expected all will have self-reviewed their performance prior to the next round of formal discussions. People also referred to key roles and responsibilities being defined in their job descriptions and there were also references to receiving feedback through case reviews. The competency framework also sets clear standards against which people are expected to perform.

High performance is encouraged through the one-to-one discussions and through the all staff meetings, team meetings and Tuesday morning sessions when performance discussions take place. I noted that guest speakers at some of the sessions provide guidance that supports high performance. I also noted that professional business partners mentor staff members, for example, on legal issues.

“There is good communication, much better than other companies I have worked for, feedback is good” - “we are lightly managed which is good” - “our duties are in our job descriptions and contracts”.

Delivering continuous improvement

You have a clear focus on continually improving performance across the organisation and including people strategies.

At corporate levels suggestions for improvement come from, for example, quality audits, the Service Improvement Group, Audit and Advisory Group and Legal Group. Teams self-assess their performance and individual encouragement to seek high performance comes from the Professional Development Programme discussions and the regular performance review meetings. Guest speakers at Tuesday morning sessions focus on high performance and visits to stakeholders’ premises take place to identify where and how services can be improved. The employee survey provides valuable feedback on people strategies and this is reinforced through the Investors in People assessment visits. I also noted that Ombudsman Association networking supports a focus on continuous improvement.

Feedback comes from a range of actions including annual Professional Development Programme meetings with a six month review session and regular less formal one-to-one discussions with people when their individual learning and development needs are discussed. I also noted that the needs of teams are considered by the teams. An example of this is with regard to the Scottish Welfare Fund team where their unique service is taken into account when agreeing needs and examples of the activities identified include legal and benefits training, dealing with difficult telephone conversations and Assist training.

The Service Improvement Group feedback is used to support the development of skills and provide an opportunity to make the most of existing skills”.

Creating sustainable success
Senior management have ensured that people have a clear understanding of the current and future priorities of the SPSO and this is strengthened through the levels of communication that engage people in short and long term planning of the organisation. As already referred to the all staff meetings, team meetings, Tuesday morning sessions and professional development programme discussions with ongoing less formal one-to-one discussions and case reviews keep people focused on performance and their contributions to successful outcomes. Management and team away days and the involvement of representatives in work groups engage staff in seeking solutions and developing plans for short and long term improvement.

The use of work-groups to seek performance improvements in selected areas has also provided the opportunity for people with the demonstrated skills and enthusiasm to participate in and lead groups and through this develop key leadership and management skills. The levels of communication and engagement have also resulted in people feeling the openness of management and levels of communication have supported them through times of change.

Managers and staff are aware of the key stakeholders the SPSO serves. They are the Scottish Government, public service providers covered by the service and the customers who make the complaints and I found people to be aware of the importance of their actions in providing the services for them. A recent addition to the organisation is a Learning & Improvement Unit set up to deliver programmes to help stakeholders to effectively manage and to reduce the rate of complaints made against them.

The approachability and supportive style of management combined with the openness and transparency from the top have supported the development of a culture where many of the people I spoke to expressed the view that the organisation is "a great place to work".

Social Responsibility

Managers and staff explained how the SPSO is a socially responsible employer and member of the community. As an employer there are positive people strategies that include a strong commitment to the health & wellbeing of employees, there is a benefits package and a confidential counselling service. I noted most people believe there is a commitment to work-life balance and flexible work arrangements as far as is reasonable taking into account the work requirements. I also noted that where possible people have agreed arrangements for home working to suit their work-life balance.

In discussions I also found the organisation supports the local community through dedicating time for staff to undertake community projects and to support charities examples being McMillan and Women's Aid. The charities are selected through staff voting for them. There is also an environmental policy with attention to recycling.

I suggest there is an opportunity to more visibly promote what the organisation does to support organisations or projects within the community.

Objective 2: develop and maintain specialist knowledge sets to ensure a requisite knowledge bank is available to support casework

Empowering and involving people

Empowerment and decision making are essential to people’s jobs and are considered to be motivational and the range of all staff, team and individual discussions combined with people development activities making sure people are equipped with the knowledge and skills required for their job.
People are involved in decision making to improve their own performance through self-reviews and feedback discussions at the Professional Development Programme and other one-to-one discussions and they confirmed support is there if required either from line or senior managers and through the availability of policies or procedures. There are also ongoing peer discussions with people sharing knowledge and information to the benefit of others.

While people are motivated through the levels of empowerment and involvement there were some references to increased workloads having an impact on performance and this may be an area requiring further consideration.

“People need to be empowered to enable them to make sound decisions” - “all staff meetings are good for information and responsibilities across teams”.

**Structuring work**

The organisation is structured to deliver services efficiently and effectively. A Director, Head of Communications and Head of Complaints Standards report to the Ombudsman and five Managers, an Assistant Manager and Executive Casework Officer report to the Director with each having a team reporting to them. While I noted there are some overlaps in service delivery, job descriptions define the levels of responsibility and decision making for each post and they minimise levels of duplication.

I found people to have a clear understanding of their roles with references made during my discussions to the job descriptions defining the key responsibilities and the level of responsibilities for decision making appropriate to the role. References were also made to the competences to be demonstrated within each role and to person specifications detailing the roles and responsibilities. While the jobs have been designed with clear boundaries there were some views that some duplication exists when cases are passed from one team to another.

Effective team working is considered essential to the success of the SPSO and people confirmed there are effective relationships with and across teams with a minority view that in some cases there could be greater effectiveness in across team collaboration. In addition to the service teams there were many references to the work groups and, from discussions with people, it is clear that the levels of consultation and engagement they create, has contributed to effective teamwork across the services and within the established teams.

While teamwork is generally considered to be effective within and across teams there were some views the levels of communication and collaboration could be further enhanced, in particular, across teams.

**Recruitment & Selection**

Discussions highlighted that the SPSO continues to have a robust approach to the recruitment and selection of people with a consistent view that the approach is fair and effective. Discussions highlighted that that opportunities are widely promoted internally and externally and the internet is used to reach a wide population. People who are, or have been, involved in both sides of the recruitment and selection process were able to explain the actions taken to make sure it is fair, effective and efficient. References were made to panel interviews with questions structured around the competences for the job, People expected to have done research on the organisation with testing on the values and there were also references to testing, for example evidence of document writing, in relation to the requirements of the post.
People found the induction to be very thorough and effective with new recruits meeting with the Ombudsman and managers and learning about the work of the different teams as well as the introduction to their own jobs. There is a six-month probationary period and during this time the new people have regular one-to-one sessions with their line managers to support them in developing their roles.

“We have a consistent approach to recruitment and selection with panel interviews and questions structured on the competences” - “we were well signposted for preparation, it was one of the most clear interviews I have had and we were document tested” - “we had a six-month induction, it was really well structured with a lot of good embedding”.

Equality and Diversity

I found a consistent view that the SPSO is fully committed to equality and diversity and this is confirmed through your five commitments with the fifth commitment being - to monitor the diversity of our workforce and supply chain, and take positive steps where under-representation exists. People referred to the recruitment of new people being focused on capability for the post as defined in job descriptions and the competences relevant to the post. There were references to policies and practices that make the SPSO more accessible to staff with different needs. They include work-life balance, flexible working, where possible home working and part-time arrangements with the working week for all being thirty-five hours. Discussions highlighted recruitment and other polices are regularly reviewed and updated where necessary. I was also advised that external review includes consideration of practices taking place within the Ombudsman Association Network. During my discussions several people provided examples of special needs being supported, an example being special leave required to meet special needs”.

I learned that staff have received training on equalities and there is access to an Equalities Officer with a Mindfulness programme having been introduced to support interested staff members in mental health “We are very keen in equality and diversity and special needs of people are taken into consideration” - “long hours are discouraged” - “training opportunities are made available to all”.

Objective 3: promote improvements in organisational performance and staff professional development through implementation of the learning and development plan.

Building capability

There is a strong commitment to the ongoing development of people and this was confirmed by people in my discussions. People joining the organisation receive an effective induction, organisation and team needs are considered in relation the services provided and changing demands on the organisation and individual needs are considered and agreed at Professional Development Programme and other one-to-one discussions that take place regularly and as opportunities arise. There is an understanding that people have a responsibility to seek to further their own development and to support this all have access to the range of e-learning programmes delivered by the organisation.
The range of activities that take place to build the skills, knowledge and capability of the organisation, teams and individuals include formal qualifications, delivery of short programmes, visits to other organisations, for example local authority visits by members of the Scottish Welfare Fund team to jointly develop positive practices, ongoing coaching and support, mentoring and through having opportunities to serve on work groups and enhance skills, for example, presentation skills. I noted that people are mentored by professionals in developing skills and knowledge.

Team and individual achievements and high performance are recognised at the one-to-one discussions, at all staff meetings and through the Annual Report.

Examples of learning and development activities delivered include Assist training to identify risks with vulnerable people, benefits training and Council visits for the Scottish Welfare Fund team, complaint handling, telephone skills, dealing with challenging behaviours and handling difficult conversations.

“There is a structured induction over six weeks” - “we are learning as we go and developing skills together, the Training Co-ordinator supports” - “we focus on specific team needs, for example, team skills, report writing and Excel” - “we have Mindfulness training to support health and wellbeing” - “induction was really good and detailed, we met with the Ombudsman and managers of each team” - “we have had extra training around complaints”.

The outcomes and impact of the learning on broader people management strategies take place through, for example, discussions with learners, observation of individual and team performance, through feedback from quality monitoring, from the Service Improvement Group, Audit and Advisory Group and customer and stakeholder satisfaction.

Recognising and rewarding high performance

In addition to a favourable salary people with demonstrated skills and knowledge and who are recognised high performers have the opportunity to develop themselves to take on expanded activities in line with their career aspirations and to achieve developed capability to seek advancement as, and when, suitable opportunities arise. Development ranges from formal qualifications to secondments and participation in work-groups. One example noted was an employee seconded to a post in the Scottish Parliament.

The SPSO has a benefits package that goes beyond legal requirements. The package includes a pension scheme, good holiday entitlement, sick pay and, in addition there is a focus on work-life balance with, as far as can be accommodated home working. There are flexible working arrangements operated on a trust basis and support to people with regard to health & wellbeing. While sometimes not recognised as a benefit people are encouraged to further develop their skills and knowledge through learning and development activities or participating in work groups.

Recognition of team and individual high performance takes place through the all staff meetings, team meetings and the one-to-one professional development reviews and during other, more frequent formal or informal discussions.

There is a strong focus on work-life balance with people working a 35 hour week and opportunities to work flexible hours, suitable work patterns and for work from where wherever this can accommodated.

“The Ombudsman passes on recognition” - “benefits include a generous pension scheme, and holiday entitlement, flexible working, and home working as far as practicable, we are quite strong on work-life balance” - “we have
favourable terms and conditions with flexible hours” and work from home, there is a Mindfulness programme to support health and wellbeing” - “we are valued, it is so transparent and motivational, we are a very well respected public service”.

You review and where appropriate improve your people management strategies, including learning and development through a wide range of internal and external sources. I noted that measures include direct observation of performance and application of learning, discussions through the Professional Development Programme and through other one-to-one sessions, quality monitoring, Service Improvement and other Group feedback, achievement of in-house and externally set performance measures and targets and external feedback includes stakeholder and customer satisfaction levels.

6. Summary of Recommendations

- While there is a high level of respect for senior management and a belief they are role models for good practice there were some views that the team could be more visible.

- While the behaviours people should demonstrate are defined in job descriptions and the competences against which individual performance is measured, there is an opportunity to focus on the behaviours to be demonstrated in relation to the values and to review performance in relation to them at professional development plan discussions.

- There may be an opportunity to deliver a refresher programme on the key roles and responsibilities of leaders taking into account the values and behaviours and with a focus on coaching.

- While people have a general understanding of what to expect from their managers in the ways they are led, managed and developed there is an opportunity to more formally promote what managers should be doing to lead, manage and develop them effectively. This could be done in the form of a management charter.

- There were suggestions that there could be greater consistency in line management communication with views that information from the top does not always reach team members. One comment was - “there is a gap in the middle”.

- I also found some people feel there could be more consistent recognition of individual and team performance.

- There were some views that staff meetings could be more focused and time managed.

- I have noted during my visits there has been the ongoing development of a coaching style of leadership and people are generally able to explain how their line managers should support them with examples being an
open, approachable and supportive leadership style and there were particular references to how managers encourage people to be empowered

- Promote what the SPSO does to support the community.

7. Next Steps

When you have received this report I will contact you to arrange a further meeting. We will then discuss the outcomes of the assessment and the potential development areas. We will also agree a strategy and plan for moving forward and supporting a culture of continuous improvement.

The new 6th Generation of IIP requires formal activity on an annual basis and future diary dates are:

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Investors in People Scotland is a not for profit organisation owned by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. Since 1991 Investors in People has set the standard for better people management and is an internationally recognised standard held by 14,000 organisations across the world. The standard defines what is required to lead, manage and support people in order to demonstrate sustainable results.

We strive to deliver value from this assessment but if you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you have received please feedback the details in the questionnaire you will be invited to complete. Alternatively please contact the Investors in People Scotland Quality Manager who will deal with your complaint. His email address is alan.gebbie@iipscotland.co.uk.
Appendix 1:
Heatmap – As Is

Heatmap – To Be
Final Results (Continued overleaf)
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<td>Creating autonomy in roles</td>
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