



## Board Meeting: 23 October 2015

## AGENDA ITEM: 5

<b>Title of paper:</b>	<b>Update on Complaints</b>
<b>Purpose of paper:</b>	Following a recent audit of the complaints advice team, we have identified actions we could take as an organisation which will significantly improve the way we handle and use organisational data. Following wider discussions with colleagues in Audit, Whistleblowing, HR and Social Research, consolidating all lessons learned across the organisation would be of considerable benefit in providing an insight into trends that appear across multiple data sources, and create a wider cycle of improvement.
<b>Action required by the Board:</b>	The Board is asked to <b>agree</b> to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating complaints leads in each Group, who will ensure that the Complaints Advice Team is made aware of details of each complaint received directly by the Group, and of any recommendations from the Ombudsman following an investigation.</li> <li>• having a standing item on their agenda bi-annually to review a synthesis of complaints and wider organisational data which will identify trends and any lessons we can learn.</li> </ul>
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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Complaints Advice Unit has recently been audited, and as well as raising reasonable adjustments we should make, it has also highlighted a significant opportunity for us as an organisation in creating a wider cycle of improvement from all the data we hold. Following discussions with colleagues in Audit, Whistleblowing, HR and Social Research, we feel there is a real opportunity to analyse and synthesise this data to provide a clear picture of where we have areas within the organisation requiring attention, provide recommendations of how we can make improvement, and in turn create a continual cycle of improvement.
- 1.2 We feel that implementing changes will significantly improve the way we handle and use complaints within the organisation in the future, and allow us to have a clear insight into how people experience our services. Reporting on this data on a regular basis will also allow us to benchmark, and look at organisational improvement over the longer term.
- 1.3 The three significant findings by the audit report are as follows:

### **Completeness of complaints data**

Groups/divisions are not, currently, maintaining data or providing reports on complaints received, and sharing detail of all complaints received with the Complaints Advice Team for logging, monitoring and progressing.

### **Complaints reports to management**

A report on complaints data has not been provided to the Board since January 2014. There is currently no lessons learned log, or any other mechanism to ensure improvements can be identified to the process or to other areas of the Welsh Government.

### **Oversight of Ombudsman's complaint actions identified for the Welsh Government**

Recommendations for the Welsh Government from the Ombudsman are sent directly to the team investigated and the Permanent Secretary. The Complaints Advice Team is only made aware when letters/details are circulated. The Complaints Advice Team should log and monitor each action to ensure that all recommendations are implemented for organisational compliance.

## 2. Issues for consideration

- 2.1 As an organisation, we don't currently have a corporate mechanism to identify trends or learn lessons from any of our reporting channels such as complaints, audit reports, whistleblowing etc. Ensuring that we consolidate and synthesise data from each of our corporate reporting channels will allow us to make sensible and proportionate business improvements where required, and improve the service we provide to our customers.

The Ombudsman believes that complaints ownership should be both top down and bottom up in any organisation, and there should be clear ownership and leadership from the Board. The Ombudsman is currently seeking to strengthen his powers to ensure all public sector organisations in Wales adhere to his model for complaints compliance.

It is important for the organisation to make every effort to comply with these significant findings by the Audit team.

### **3. Resource implications**

- 3.1 There will be a small resource implication in each Group in creating complaints leads; however this is important in enabling accurate records and learning lessons to enable continual improvement.
- 3.2 There are no financial implications to this proposal.
- 3.3 The impact on members of staff in implementing these changes is most likely to be positive. Communicating our organisational requirements will ensure colleagues fully understand our duties under the complaints procedure; ensure that they deal with complaints in the most appropriate way moving forward; and in time reduce the number of complaints received through our lessons learned mechanism. The Ombudsman also looks at consistent application of complaints procedures when reviewing cases.

### **4. Risks**

- 4.1 Organisationally, we risk repeating the same mistakes and creating additional work for members of staff in the longer term if we don't look at how we can learn lessons and share best practice across these areas.
- 4.2 The Complaints Advice Team is also due for a repeat audit in 2016. Failing to take on board recommendations and make improvements will result in a second poor audit report, highlighting our failure to implement actions.

### **5. Communication**

- 5.1 The Complaints Advice Team will communicate widely on the importance of complaints records and sharing details of any complaints so that the organisation holds a central record. There will also be continual communication on any lessons learned to share best practice. A full communications plan will be drafted to complement Board recommendations, and this would be implemented in the New Year.

### **6. General Compliance Issues**

- 6.1 The Ombudsman is proposing to extend his current jurisdiction. Welsh public service providers are asked to adopt the Ombudsman's

complaints model and guidance used by his office, but there is currently no statutory obligation for them to do so. The Minister for Public Services and the Assembly Finance Committee have considered the Ombudsman's requests, and have issued a report supporting a committee bill being introduced following the elections in May 2016. Although the Welsh Government currently adopts the Ombudsman's model, the areas highlighted by the Audit report would ensure that we are fully compliant if this becomes a statutory obligation.

## **7. Recommendations**

7.1 Our recommendations are as follows:

- **To establish a complaints lead in each Group**

This would ensure that consistent data is gleaned from each group/department, and would provide a clear link with the Complaints Advice Team. These leads would ensure that we hold a robust set of data on all complaints received by the organisation, and can ensure that the organisation is compliant following recommendations from the Ombudsman's review of any Welsh Government cases.

We would recommend that this be a small part of a role, and the lead would simply act as the contact point for the Complaints Advice Team and for all members of staff within Groups/departments. A suggestion is that this could fall within the remit of Operations Teams. The Complaints Advice Team has set up a complaints working group, and complaints leads would also be invited to sit on the working group. We would be keen to receive data on the number and type of complaints received by Groups/departments on a quarterly basis as a minimum.

- **To re-instate a regular, bi-annual report to the Board.**

Insight on trends and analysis of complaints data should highlight areas for improvement and possible efficiencies within Groups/departments. However, to get full value from this data we propose bringing it together with findings from quarterly audit reports, whistleblowing panels, risk registers, grievances, the people survey and wider employee research programme, and the stakeholder research programme to enable a wider understanding of organisational issues and help the Board in identifying where action needs to be taken.

There is currently inconsistency across the organisation in the quality and accuracy of responses to complainants, and this is resulting in more complaints being made to the Ombudsman. Other improvements that the Complaints Advice Team will undertake to improve consistency include: assisting colleagues in the presentation of complaint responses and providing advice on complaints process management, to ensure all colleagues are following the correct procedures. We hope that creating this positive internal cycle of complaints analysis will help all colleagues become more proactive in their approach to any complaints received in the future.

- 7.2 The Board is asked to **agree** to:
- creating complaints leads in each Group, who will ensure that the Complaints Advice Team is made aware of details of each complaint received directly by the Group, and of any recommendations from the Ombudsman following an investigation.
  - having a standing item on their agenda bi-annually to review complaints data and any lessons we can learn.

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### **Publication**

This paper (including Annexes) can be published in full as none of the exemptions in the Code of Practice on Public Access to Information apply.

**Date submitted to Secretariat:** 13 October 2015