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David Cullum
Local Government and Regeneration
Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Your Reference:

Our reference: RB/hm/1318514

22 January 2014

Dear Mr Cullum

LOCAL AUTHORITY COMPLAINT HANDLERS NETWORK

I refer to the above and your letter dated 8 January 2014 in which you sought to establish on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee why the Moray Council had apparently not engaged with the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network.

I would take this opportunity to reassure you that the principle of sharing best practice and comparing performance is one which The Moray Council endorses and has shared information with both other Local Authorities and SPSO during the implementation of the model Complaints Handling Policy. Whilst the Moray Council is not represented at the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network I would reassure you that we are fully supportive of its remit and have actually engaged with the group remotely.

I can confirm that we requested and received from SPSO by zip file, the papers from the network and have requested, twice, that video-conferencing be made available to enable us to participate in meetings remotely unfortunately on both occasions we were advised that neither video nor audio conferencing was available. The Ombudsman's office has subsequently confirmed that the group is led and organised by North Lanarkshire Council and we will be exploring with them opportunities for involvement either through actual attendance or other practical means of sharing the outcome of meetings.

In essence whilst we fully support the remit of the network and have to a limited extent, engaged with its work and with some of the participants outwith the formal meetings, we have simple logistical reasons which I understand are shared with those Councils furthest away from the centre, for not attending in person. The meetings are typically held in Glasgow on Friday morning and to attend would

necessitate an overnight stay on Thursday and not returning until Friday evening. We want to participate but consider in these circumstances that video or audio conferencing, with all its limitations, remains the most cost-effective means of doing so.

I have therefore instructed the complaint officers to establish links with their counterparts at North Lanarkshire Council to explore the possibility of setting up either video or audio conferencing facilities for future meetings. If such links can be made available our complaints investigators will gladly participate, however, if not the possibility of actual attendance or of setting up information sharing arrangements will be considered. In any event we will ensure we are updated regarding the work of the Complaint Handlers Network which I readily acknowledge is valuable and integral to moving the implementation and application of the Complaints Handling Policy forward.

One final thought on participation, in the past the Ombudsman organised networking meetings usually on an annual basis and these were useful bringing together all Councils in Scotland to share best practice and for discussing developments in complaint handling. I have asked the Council complaint officers to raise with the Ombudsman the possibility of arranging such meetings in future. When combined with the more frequent Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network operated by North Lanarkshire this would ensure at least all Councils in Scotland met at least once a year to discuss and share developments in best practice in complaint handling procedures. This would have value for all concerned and especially for those Councils furthest away from the central belt.

I trust that this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Roddy Burns