
AUDITOR GENERAL

Halifax Regional Municipality

T.I.P.S. Hotline
- Taking Improvement and
Performance Seriously

2015 Annual Report

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TIPS Hotline 2015 Annual Report

December 2015

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Preamble

In 2011, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) launched a confidential telephone and online service to act as an independent point of contact, augmenting other reporting mechanisms for the organization and its employees. The TIPS Hotline now receives regular contacts from citizens and employees of HRM.

The TIPS Telephone Hotline along with the Internet based alternative, is not intended to replace business processes established by HRM to address issues of an operational nature, but rather to capture and evaluate concerns or complaints of potential inefficiencies (waste) or fraud (potentially illegal/irregular behaviour) involving HRM resources.

In this the fifth full year of operation (2015), the TIPS Hotline (telephone and web form) received 40 contacts (a decrease of 11% from 2014) relating to a variety of concerns involving HRM business units.

Methodology

Contacts through the TIPS Hotline are reviewed and managed within a pre-defined framework. Concerns are screened and considered for further action based on the initial information provided. With most contacts, preliminary inquiries are conducted to determine whether the concern(s) appears to have merit, falls within the mandate of the OAG and/or to obtain additional information which might suggest the appropriate course of action.

Individuals contacting the OAG through the TIPS Hotline (or through other means for that matter) may remain anonymous but are encouraged to leave contact information (which is held in strict confidence) to be accessed only if the issue requires further clarification. In any situation where the information provided has insufficient detail and no contact information is provided, further follow-up is difficult.

Disposition of Contacts

Contacts received by the OAG may be administered in one or more of the following ways:

- No action
 - based on insufficient detail and no contact information being provided,
 - based on preliminary inquiries,
 - complaint outside the responsibility area of OAG,
- Referral to and follow-up with
 - business unit(s),
 - ABC (Agency, Board or Commission),
 - Outside agency/agencies,
- File opened and formal review or examination undertaken by OAG,
- Compliance or value for money project commenced,
- Audit Universe Candidate (future project candidate or part of a larger project).

Synopsis

Each opened file is managed until it has been resolved to the extent possible. In any case where a formal review or examination is undertaken (based on preliminary findings), sufficient and appropriate information/evidence is gathered to support the OAG's conclusion(s). In cases where the available information does not support a conclusive finding, the file is closed as unsubstantiated. (This does not mean the concern could not have merit, only there was insufficient evidence available.) However, given the nature of the concern, it may subsequently be included in the work plan of the Auditor General as an emerging issue and/or recommendations may be made to HRM Administration to highlight the issue(s) or risk(s) which could continue to be of concern. It is also possible concerns may not warrant an individual project, but may become a component of another project within the OAG audit universe.

In cases where a file is opened and the OAG examination supports the allegation or concern, the concern is considered substantiated. Not all substantiated findings reflect wrongdoing or wastefulness on the part of any one individual. A substantiated finding may reflect poor policy design, the improper application of a business process or simply poor judgement.

During 2015, 16 concerns brought to the OAG's attention through TIPS were subsequently included in the OAG audit universe for future consideration.

Of the 40 concerns received by the OAG during 2015, 25 concerns gave rise to an opened file and examination, which may have resulted in the concern being included in the work plan of the Auditor General as an emerging issue, recommendations being made to HRM Administration or referral to HRM Administration.

An area of continued concern to the OAG is the number of calls with the final disposition outside of the mandate of the Auditor General. In 2012, 16% of calls were deemed outside of the mandate of the OAG, in 2013 this grew to 18%. In 2014 the number of calls deemed outside the responsibility of the office grew to 38%, and in 2015 this remained high, again at 38% (15 of 40) of all concerns received. As mentioned in the preamble, the TIPS line is not intended to replace normal business processes established by HRM to address issues of an operational nature, but rather to capture and evaluate concerns or complaints of potential inefficiencies (waste) or fraud (potentially illegal/irregular behaviour) involving HRM resources. The OAG believes this increase in calls outside of the mandate maybe a result of other reporting channels not being clearly communicated to citizens and/or employees.

Summary Tables Description

The Tables which follow provide aggregate information regarding the types of concerns (and disposition) received during calendar year 2015.

Table 1 Contacts - Relating to a Business Unit, Agency, Board or Commission – Calendar Year 2015 provides the numerical breakdown of contacts received where responsibility with respect to the matter most likely resided at the time of the contact (by business unit, agency, board or commission).

Table 2 Contacts by Nature of Concern, Business Unit, Agency, Board or Commission – Calendar Year 2015 summarizes in general terms, the types of matters received by business unit as categorized by the OAG. The concerns category provides a succinct explanation as to the nature of the issue while maintaining confidentiality and privacy.

Table 3 Contacts by Initial Nature of Concern – Calendar Years 2015, 2014 indicates the numeric change in the nature of the concerns received by the OAG.

Table 4 – Contacts by Final Disposition – Calendar Year 2015 - indicates how the concerns were classified and closed subsequent to an initial examination by the OAG.

Table 1 Contacts - Relating to a Business Unit, Agency, Board or Commission – Calendar Year 2015

Business Unit / Agency, Board or Commission	Number of Contacts
Chief Administrator's Office	4
Regional Council	1
Finance, Information, Communications and Technology	4
Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency	2
Halifax Regional Police	1
Halifax Transit	3
Human Resources	1
Legal	1
Parks and Recreation	3
Planning and Development	4
Transportation and Public Works	11
Non-Specific or Multiple Business Units	5
Total	40

Table 2 Contacts by Nature of Concern, Business Unit, Agency, Board or Commission – Calendar Year 2015

Business Unit / Agency, Board or Commission	Conflict of Interest	Contract Management	Customer Service	Hiring Practices	Misuse of HRM Resources	Related to Regional Council	Staff Conduct	Other	Total
Chief Administrator's Office					4				4
Regional Council						1			1
Finance, Information, Communications and Technology				1	3				4
Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency					2				2
Halifax Regional Police					1				1
Halifax Transit					2		1		3
Human Resources				1					1
Legal								1	1
Parks and Recreation		1						2	3
Planning and Development		1	1					2	4
Transportation and Public Works	2	6			1			2	11
Non-Specific or Multiple Business Units						1		4	5
Total	2	8	1	2	13	2	1	11	40

Table 3 Contacts by Initial Nature of Concern – Calendar Years 2015, 2014

Initial Category of Contact/Concern	2015	2014	Change over 2014
Conflict of Interest	2	4	-2
Contract Management	8	3	+5
Customer Service	1	1	-
Hiring Practices	2	3	-1
Misuse of HRM Resources	13	15	-2
Procurement Practices	-	3	-3
Related to Regional Council	2	6	-4
Staff Conduct	1	3	-2
Other	11	7	+4
Total	40	45	-5

Table 4 – Contacts by Final Disposition – Calendar Year 2015

OAG Disposition	Number of Contacts
Closed – Audit Universe Candidate	16
Closed – Complaint outside of Mandate	15
Closed – Referred to Business Unit	4
Closed after Preliminary Inquiry	4
Closed – Insufficient Information	1
Total	40