

Report to: The Executive Board
Month: July 2007
From: Carolyn Hirst
For: Noting and Discussion
Subject: Service Quality Complaints
Status: Open

1. Purpose

To provide the Executive Board with a summary of the nature and outcome of Service Quality complaints received by the SPSO in the first quarter of 2007-08 and the learning that has resulted from these complaints.

2. Contribution to the Business Plan

Continuous improvement - on-going

3. Key points

14 Service Quality complaints were received in the first quarter of 2007-08. 11 of these complaints had been determined by the quarter end. The main reasons for complaint were issues relating to the complaint handling process (how decision made, bias, conduct of investigation etc), communication and delay. 54% of the determined complaints were either fully or partly upheld. This Report sets out the learning for the SPSO from the determined Service Quality complaints and notes the learning points that were actioned in the quarter.

4. Resource Implications

None.

5. Recommendations

Note the Report contents and discuss as required.

6. Actions required

See above.

Service Quality Complaints 2007-08 First Quarter

Statistical Summary

14 Service Quality complaints were received during the first quarter of 2007-08 (April to June). This represents an increase in the number of complaints received if compared to the same quarter in the previous year (8 Service Quality complaints were received in the first quarter of 2006-07). There is 1 complaint 'on hold' from 2006-07.

All 14 Service Quality complaints received the first quarter were from complainants. The main reasons for complaint were issues relating to the complaint handling process (how decision made, perceived bias, conduct of investigation etc), communication and delay. 11 of the 14 complaints had been determined by the end of June 2007. 54% of the determined complaints were either fully or partly upheld. The 11 determined complaints are summarised in the Table below:

Main Reason for Complaint	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld	No Finding/ Withdrawn	Total Cases	%
Delay	1		1		2	19%
Communication	1	1		1	3	27%
Process	1	1	1	2	5	45%
Error		1			1	9%
Total	3	3	2	3	11	100%
%	27%	27%	19%	27%	100%	

Learning from Service Quality Complaints

In the main the Service Quality complaints related closely to the decision reached in the original complaint by the SPSO, as most complainants were either dissatisfied that their original complaint was not going to investigation or had not been upheld. 6 of the determined complaints were at Step 2 of the SPSO complaints process (5 were closed and the open Step 2 complaint was about delay) and 5 determined complaints were at Step 4 (4 of which had published reports). This quarter had more complaints about process than about delay when compared to the previous quarter. The 'delay' complaints tended to relate to complaints handling by more than one Complaints Investigator. In the complaints about delay, the response has been to give an apology, provide an explanation and let the complainant know what the SPSO is doing/has done to address the issue.

In one of the closed Step 2 complaints the service quality issue was that the complainant had not been advised on what to do if he was dissatisfied with the SPSO response. This issue will be addressed in the proposed review of the Service Quality process, which will also look at the relationship between service quality and 'comebacks'.

2 of the determined Step 4 complaints highlighted a lack of clarity as to what exactly it was that the SPSO had decided to investigate. This highlighted the importance of setting out the investigation 'heads' of complaint clearly and in writing to both the complainant and the body. It also highlighted the importance of managing complainant expectations at an early stage as to what the SPSO could and could not do in relation to the particular complaint.

A number of the Step 4 complaints related to discontent that the SPSO had apparently not taken account of comments made by the complainant in response to the draft Investigation Report. It is noted that the SPSO letter to the complainant that accompanies the draft Report asks for comments on whether the SPSO has used their evidence correctly, missed out any relevant evidence or missed out any important arguments. It is

suggested that this letter (or accompanying information) needs to be more explicit in order to explain fully the nature of the comments that will be considered and how the SPSO will deal with any comments made about the evidence relating to the complaint. It should also be made clear that the conclusions and decision are for the SPSO to make.

A number of the Service Quality complaints referred to the use of professional clinical advisers. This suggests that some additional clarity/information would be helpful to explain to complainants when and why these advisers are used, how their advice is utilised by the SPSO and how decisions relating to clinical issues are reached in health cases.

Learning already actioned from Service Quality Complaints

- An in-house reminder that if a letter to the SPSO is addressed to one person and it is decided that another person should respond, then the reason for the second person responding should be made clear in the response letter.
- Amendment to the Report Cover letter to the complainant to make it clear that a copy of the Report has also been sent to the body.
- A review of the proof-checking process relating to Investigation Reports has taken place and additional in-house guidance has been issued as a result.