

Report to: The Executive Board
Month: January 2008
From: Carolyn Hirst, Independent Service Quality Reviewer
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 third quarter of 2007-08 and any learning that has resulted from these complaints.

2. Contribution to the Business Plan

Continuous improvement - on-going

3. Key points

Service Quality complaints during the third quarter of 2007-08 were determined in my temporary role as Independent Service Quality Reviewer. Six Service Quality complaints were received in the third quarter of 2007-08 (eight less than the number received in both of the first two quarters of 2007/08). Five of these 'new' complaints had been determined by the quarter end, together with three complaints from the previous quarter. There is one complaint on hold. The main reasons for complaint were issues relating to delay and communication. Three out of the eight complaints determined (37.5%) were either fully or partly upheld. This Report sets out the learning for the SPSO from the determined Service Quality complaints.

4. Resource Implications

None.

5. Recommendations

Note the Report contents and discuss as required.

6. Actions required

See above.

Service Quality Complaints 2007-08 Third Quarter

Statistical Summary

Six Service Quality complaints were received during the third quarter of 2007-08 (October to December). There is one complaint 'on hold' from 2006-07. All six Service Quality complaints received the second quarter were from complainants or their representatives. The main reasons for complaint were delay and communication.

Five of the six complaints received during the third quarter were determined by the end of December 2007, together with three complaints received in the previous quarter. 37.5% of the complaints determined in the third quarter were either fully or partly upheld (compared with 46% in the second quarter). The eight determined complaints are summarised in the Table below:

Main Reason for Complaint	Upheld	Partly upheld	Not upheld	No Finding/ Withdrawn	Total Cases	%
Delay	2				2	25%
Delay and Process			1		1	12.5%
Communication		1		1	2	25%
Process			1		1	12.5%
Dissatisfaction				2	2	25%
Total	2	1	2	3	8	100%
%	25%	12.5%	25%	37.5%	100%	

Four of the Service Quality complaints determined during the quarter concerned original complaints that had been closed at Step 2 of the SPSO complaints process. The other four Service Quality complaints related to original complaints that were at Step 4 of the SPSO process: two of which were at the draft Investigation Report and two of which related to complaints where the Report had been published.

Learning from Service Quality Complaints

The two upheld complaints about delay were relatively straightforward to determine as in both cases the Complaints Investigator and their Manager were in agreement that it had taken too long to progress the complaint. The learning from these complaints was the on-going requirement to keep both the complainant and body informed about progress (this was lacking in one of the complaints).

There were three complaints this quarter which resulted in a 'no finding' outcome. Two of these were not Service Quality complaints, as such, but more general dissatisfaction with their interaction with the SPSO. These complaints were both from complainants who were very unhappy about being contacted as part of the recent SPSO Satisfaction survey. There was no finding in these cases as there was, in essence, no specific complaint.

The third complaint with a 'no finding' outcome was about communication. The complaint was that a phone conversation with a Complaints Investigator had been difficult and disagreeable. These words were used by the Complaints Investigator to describe the same phone call. The subject of the telephone call was the complaint decision. I had no reason to doubt the experience of either party, but did not reach a finding, as without independent witnesses, it is difficult to determine complaints about whether the behaviour or attitude of a person was inappropriate.

I partly upheld another complaint about communication where, amongst other issues, the complainant considered that the tone of the responses from a Complaints Investigator and Manager had changed after

the issue of the draft Investigation Report. My finding was that I considered that letters often do become more formal and direct at the decision stage of a complaint, but that I did not consider that the tone was inappropriate. However, I did suggest to SPSO staff that strong phrases such as 'I told you' may not be the most constructive ones to use when an issue was under discussion. Taking both complaints about communication into account, the SPSO may want to provide additional guidance, and possibly consider training, on conveying and explaining decisions that are not favourable to a party.

Finally, there were two complaints concerning the SPSO process, neither of which I upheld. One of these complaints concerned the SPSO decision to close a complaint at Step 2 because the subject matter was not within the remit of the SPSO, and the issue here, essentially was that the complainant did not understand or accept the decision. The second complaint related to a published Report and a concern raised was that the Complaints Investigator had said that the Report would be laid before the Scottish Parliament towards the end of the month. In fact, the current SPSO practice is for Investigation Reports to be laid before the Scottish Parliament on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. I consider that the 'before the end of the month' wording could have led the complainant to believe that the Report would be laid at a date later than intended. I have already drawn this point to the attention of the SPSO Director of Investigations, as this wording is commonly used in SPSO correspondence relating to Investigation Reports.