

2018-19 Q3 Customer Service Complaints Report

From: **John Stevenson, Head of Improvement, Standards and Engagement**
 To: **SPSO Leadership Team**
 Date: **12 February 2019**

Purpose

1. This report has been prepared to provide a summary of Customer Service Complaints (CSCs) received and responded to by the SPSO during Quarter 3 (Q3) of the year 2018-19. It also reflects the performance in the year to date. Where appropriate the report seeks to provide a summary of outcomes, trends and actions taken as a result of these complaints including key learning points for SPSO in relation to service improvement.
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Reporting customer service complaints

2. Details of all CSCs are recorded (on Workpro) and we publish on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response. The CSCs we received are analysed for trend information to ensure that, where possible, we identify areas where our service could improve and take appropriate action. Further reference is made to this in paragraph 11, and in the 'summary of complaints outcomes' (paragraphs 16 to 21).
 3. We publish this report on a quarterly basis to help ensure transparency in our complaints handling and to demonstrate to our customers that complaints can influence our service. We also publish, on an annual basis, more detailed information on our performance in handling complaints. This includes statistics showing the volumes and types of complaints and key performance details, including the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.
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Q3 statistics for customer service complaints

Received & closed

4. Table 1 provides a breakdown of complaints received and closed during Q3.

Table 1 (Q3)	<i>Received</i>	<i>Closed</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	14	15
Stage 2 - Investigation	2	3
Escalated Complaints (escalated from stage 1 to stage 2)	6	5
Total	22	23

5. Where a difference exists in the number of cases received in the quarter and the number of cases closed in the quarter (in this case frontline resolution and investigation), this is due to cases received in an earlier quarter being closed in Q3.
6. Complaints may be closed at different stages of the CSC procedure:
 - Closures at Stage 1 - Frontline resolution refers to complaints closed at Stage 1 of the procedure, with no escalation to the next stage
 - Closures at Stage 2 - Investigation refers to complaints handled and closed directly at Stage 2 of the procedure (Frontline resolution was not attempted)
 - Closures of Escalated Complaints – refers to complaints handled at Stage 1 and subsequently escalated to, and closed at Stage 2.
7. Quarter 3 saw an increase in complaints received and closed, when compared to the previous two quarters. The total complaints received in Qs 1 and 2 (combined) was 27. In Q3, we received 22 complaints, an increase of 81% by volume on the total in the year to date for the first half of the year. However, the volume of service complaints received in the year to date is broadly similar to the same period last year, where by the end of Q3 we had received 48 service complaints. These numbers are relatively low for an organisation of our size.
8. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints received and closed in the year to date (Qs 1, 2 and 3)

Table 2 (year to date)	<i>Received</i>	<i>Closed</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	32	33
Stage 2 - Investigation	6	7
Escalated Complaints (escalated from stage 1 to stage 2)	11	11
Total	49	51

Upheld/Not upheld

9. Table 3 provides a breakdown of complaints upheld and not upheld during Q3. Table 4 provides data reflecting the upheld and not upheld rates in the year to date.

Table 3 (Q3)	<i>Upheld</i>	<i>Not Upheld</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% upheld</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	4	11	15	27%
Stage 2 - Investigation	0	3	3	0%
Escalated Complaints	1	4	5	20%
Total	5	18	23	

Table 4 (year to date)	<i>Upheld</i>	<i>Not Upheld</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% upheld</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	7	26	33	21%
Stage 2 - Investigation	1	6	7	14%
Escalated Complaints	2	9	11	18%
Total	10	41	51	

10. The number of upheld service complaints is generally low in relation to the overall volumes of customer transactions delivered each year. Nevertheless, upheld service complaints (and in some cases, not upheld service complaints) provide us with a valuable opportunity to learn when things go wrong, so that we may improve our service provision in the future.

11. In Q3, the upheld service complaints identified issues in relation to communication failings. Further information is provided in the 'summary of complaints outcomes' detailed below. Individual staff members have been reminded of the service standards that we commit to deliver. We will continue to monitor this, and take account of any themes, trends and patterns, identified in the end of year analysis of service complaints. Where appropriate this performance information will inform future training opportunities for SPSO staff.

Timescales

12. The timescales by which we measure our performance against the requirements of the complaints procedure are:

- 5 working days at stage 1
- 20 working days at stage 2
- 20 working days for escalated complaints.

13. Table 5 illustrates our performance in relation to timescales during Q3.

Table 5 (Q3)	<i>Met timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Did not meet timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Total number of working days</i>	<i>Average time in working days to close</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	12	3	64	4.3
Stage 2 - Investigation	3	0	58	19.3
Escalated Complaints	5	0	93	18.6

14. During Q3, the timescales were met in 80% of the stage 1 complaints we handled, and in 100% of the stage 2 (including escalated) complaints we handled.

15. Table 6 illustrates our performance against the timescales in the year to date. For stage 1 complaints achievement is 79% and for stage 2 (including escalated) achievement is 83%.

Table 6 (year to date)	<i>Met timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Did not meet timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Total number of working days</i>	<i>Average time in working days to close</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	26	7	146	4.42
Stage 2 - Investigation	5	2	155	22.14
Escalated Complaints	10	1	201	18.27

Summary of complaints outcomes and service failures

16. In Q3, we upheld five service complaints. Four were handled at stage 1 of the complaints procedure. Two were fully upheld and two were partially upheld. One escalated complaint was also upheld. The details of these cases are presented in the following paragraphs.

Fully upheld at stage 1 (201802674)

17. We failed to meet our commitment to communicate effectively in this case. This failure resulted in the customer attending the office, when in fact a telephone discussion would have been more appropriate. When they arrived at our office, we asked them to return later the same day. We should have arranged to speak with the customer on arrival at the office. We apologised for this poor service. We also offered to provide a refund for any monies spent on refreshments between visits to the office.

Fully upheld at stage 1 (201804991)

18. In this case, we followed our documented procedure in arriving at our decision. However, we did not meet the customer service standard that we expect of ourselves in relation to communicating effectively. Specifically we did not fully explain our investigation process to the organisation, and the options open to them if they disagreed with our initial view. For this reason, we upheld this service complaint at Stage 1 of our service complaints procedure. We also apologised for this omission.

Partially upheld at stage 1 (201806842)

19. In this case, we did not meet our commitment to communicate effectively with our customer. We returned information by post, despite a request to only be contacted by phone or email. We should have made contact by phone to explain the need to return information by post, before doing so. We apologised for this service failure.

Partially upheld at stage 1 (201807297)

20. In this case, we did not meet our commitment to communicate effectively. Our customer complained about the way in which we summarised his complaint. In line with our guidance, we reported that the complaint was 'not upheld', when in our communication with the customer we reported our decision as 'no finding'. We explained the reason for this. We agreed that the clarity of our communication could have been clearer. We apologised for this shortcoming.

Partially upheld escalated case (201806180)

21. In this particular case, the customer complained that in responding to his complaint at stage 1 of the service complaints procedure, we failed to respond to one of the complaints he had made, under a specific heading. We accepted that although we had responded to the issue, we had not done so under a clear heading. We agreed that this fell short of our commitment to be as accurate, plain and clear as we can in our communications. We apologised for this service failure.

Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)

22. During Q3, the ICCR closed five cases where an independent review of our complaints handling and decision had been requested by our customer. The independent reviewer did not uphold any of these complaints.

Next steps

23. This report has been prepared to update the Leadership Team. Thereafter it is shared with the Casework Performance Group and the Service Improvement Forum. Its findings are also shared internally and made available online.

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SPSO