

2019-20 Annual Customer Service Complaints Report

From: **John Stevenson, Head of Improvement, Standards and Engagement**
 To: **SPSO Leadership Team**
 Date: **19 June 2020**

Purpose

1. This report has been prepared to provide an overview of all Customer Service Complaints (CSCs) received and responded to by the SPSO during the business year 2019-20. The report also provides a summary of outcomes, trends and actions taken as a result of these CSCs including key learning points for SPSO in relation to service improvement.
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Reporting customer service complaints

2. This annual report brings together performance information from April 2019 to March 2020 to provide the annual overview of CSCs. The report is published to help ensure transparency in our handling of CSCs and to demonstrate to our customers that we value complaints, we apologise if something goes wrong or we do not meet the standards of service that we expect of ourselves and, wherever possible, we use the learning from these complaints to improve our services.
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Annual statistics for customer service complaints 2019-20

Received & closed

3. Table 1 provides a breakdown of CSCs received and closed during the year.

Table 1 (2019-20)	<i>Received</i>	<i>Closed</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	74	74
Stage 2 – Investigation & Escalated Complaints	47	48
Total	121	122

4. Where a difference exists in the number of cases received and the number of cases closed (in this case Stage 2 complaints), this is due to cases received in the previous year being closed in 2019 -20.

5. 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.

6. The profile of service complaints was proactively raised during this year. This included awareness sessions and empowering staff to identify and respond to expressions of dissatisfaction from customers, as complaints about the service.

7. The years 2017-18 and 2018-19 saw a very similar performance in relation to the volume of CSCs received with 68, and then 71 service complaints closed year on year. This year we received a total of 121 CSCs. This increase in volume was expected and is considered to be a positive outcome in response to increasing awareness, demonstrating that we value complaints and holding ourselves to high customer service standards.

Upheld/Not upheld

8. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints upheld and not upheld during the year 2019-20.

Table 2 (2019-20)	<i>Upheld</i>	<i>Not Upheld</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% upheld</i>	<i>2018/19</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	32	41	73	44%	29%
Stage 2 – Investigation & Escalated Complaints	12	33	45	27%	19%
Total	44	74	118	n/a	n/a

Numbers do not total the closed figures as withdrawn complaints are not included in the uphold rate calculation

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

10. We upheld 44% of CSCs at stage 1 of the complaints procedure. These complaints are generally, simple and straightforward issues, where we take early action to resolve the matter. This illustrates that CSCs are being resolved quickly, and close to the point of service delivery; one of the key requirements of effective complaints handling. It also demonstrates that we acknowledge where something has gone wrong, we apologise for this and we work to resolve matters.

11. Stage 2 CSCs often relate to more complex matters where a full investigation is usually required. We upheld 27% of these complaints, again apologising where we had not met the service standards that we commit to, and taking corrective action wherever possible. In each of these cases we signposted our customer to the Independent Service Complaints Reviewer, and encouraged them to contact this service if they remained unhappy with the way in which we dealt with the CSC.

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 3 illustrates our performance against the timescales in 2019-20.

Table 3 (2019-20)	<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	90	11	307	3.0
Stage 2 – Investigation & Escalated Complaints	38	10	657	13.7

14. For stage 1 CSCs we met the timescales in 89% of these cases, an improvement on our achievement in 2018-19 which was 79%.

15. For stage 2 CSCs we met the timescales in 79% of these cases. This was a slight reduction percentage wise when compared to our 2018-19 achievement of 83% for stage 2 cases, importantly however, we saw a 77% increase in relation to the volume of CSCs handled at stage 2 during 2019-20 .

Summary of complaints outcomes and service failures

16. The main reasons we upheld these complaints related to delays in progressing our work, and a failure to communicate effectively.

17. Thirty three percent (33%) of CSCs upheld at stage 1 related to delays, and/or communication issues. At stage 2, 9 of the 12 upheld cases related to delays, and/or communication issues.

Recommendation

18. We are currently consulting with staff in advance on introducing workstreams to look at how we can work more effectively following the impact of Covid 19. Two of the workstreams will relate to
- Complaints casework: including consideration of the way we prioritise and progress casework, and
 - Communication: including consideration of the main barriers to communicating effectively.
19. It is recommended that each of these workstreams take account of the findings of this annual CSC report to consider way to improve the timeliness of our complaints handling, and improvements in the way and frequency of our communications with customers.

Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)

20. During the year 19 CSCs were received by ICCR. Fourteen CSCs were determined and closed, 2 customers withdrew their CSC, and 3 CSCs were still being considered by the ICCR at the end of the year.
21. The ICCR upheld one customer services complaint of the 14 she decided and closed, that was not previously upheld by SPSO
22. In 13 of the 14 complaints examined by ICCR there was no evidence of a service failure or maladministration by SPSO, or a failure by SPSO to effectively handle the service complaint.

Random review of files by the ICCR

23. The ICCR conducted 2 physical random reviews of CSC files during the year, namely in July 2019 and January 2020. The random reviews consisted of 20 files in aggregate that were closed by SPSO, and were not escalated by the customers to ICCR.
24. In aggregate, the ICCR's findings from these random reviews of CSCs closed by SPSO concluded:
- there is continuous improvement in SPSO customer service file management that ICCR could see from her random reviews to date;
 - SPSO customer service communications randomly reviewed came across as accurate, plain and clear; and
 - SPSO's customer service decisions were fairly handled by SPSO.

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SPSO