

**Organisation learning from Customer Service Complaints  
2016-17 Q2**

**From:** Emma Gray, Head of Communications and Engagement  
**When:** November 2016

### Purpose

To provide a summary of Customer Service Complaints (CSCs) received and responded to by the SPSO and the SPSO Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR) in the last quarter and provide a summary of outcomes, trends and actions taken as a result of these complaints including, where appropriate, key learning points for SPSO service improvement.

### Reporting customer service complaints

In line with CSA requirements, 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. These are then analysed for trend information to ensure we identify areas where our service could improve and take appropriate action.

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.

### Complaints received and responded to

#### Received

Summary	Advice	Early Resolution	Investigation	Total
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	2	6	0	<b>8</b>
Stage 2 - Senior Management	0	4	1	<b>5</b>
Stage 3 - ISDR	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>

We received 13 customer service complaints in Q2. Although this is an increase on the eight we received in Q1 it is in line with the volumes of the previous six months.

The breakdown of received complaints, by stage, in Q2 is as follows:

- 8 at Stage 1 Manager
- 5 at Stage 2 Senior Management

The Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR) received one complaint following the completion of our internal process (the same as the previous quarter).

## Responded to

Summary	Fully Upheld	Not Upheld	Some Upheld	Total
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	1	6	0	7
Stage 2 - Senior Management	0	3	1	4
Stage 3 - ISDR	0	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

SPSO responded to 11 service complaints in this period. This is in line with the volumes of the previous six months.

Seven were responded to at stage 1 (Officer / Manager):

- Two of these were responded to at Advice Team;
- Five of these were responded to at Early Resolution;

Four were responded to at stage 2 (Director / Head of Communications and Engagement):

- Three were related to Early Resolution;
- One related to Investigations.

The Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR) responded to two complaints.

## Summary of complaints outcomes and service failures

Breakdown of complaints responded to by stage and outcome is shown in the table below. Each complaint contains a number of individual heads of complaint so the decision outlined represents a summary of these complaint outcomes.

CSC Type	Fully Upheld	Not Upheld	Some Upheld	Total	2016-17 Q2 % upheld	2016-17 Q1 % upheld	2015-16 % upheld
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	1	6	0	7	14%	17%	13%
Stage 2 - Senior Management	0	3	1	4	25%	33%	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>15%</b>
Stage 3 - ISDR	0	1	1	2	50%	0%	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>22%</b>

## Upheld complaints

Of the eleven complaints responded to by SPSO in this period, two were fully upheld or some upheld (18%). Nine (82%) were not upheld. This is in line with the upheld rate of the previous quarter. The ICCR responded to two complaints in Q2. One was not upheld and one was partly upheld. For comparison, SPSO internal upheld rates in 2014-15 averaged at 24% for the year and for 2015-16 at 15%. The ICCR upheld rate for 2014-15 was 18% and for 2015-16 44%.

## Service failures identified

Specific service failures identified in Quarter 2 are summarised below.

### Stage 1 (Officer / Manager)

We apologised to a complainant for the fact that the CR had issued a letter so close to their leave date inviting the complainant to call them, even though the CR would already have left SPSO employ by the time the complainant received it. We agreed that this was poor customer service

and meant that the complainant had lost the opportunity for a fuller discussion with the CR who had originally worked the case. We upheld the complaint and discussed with the complainant what further action he wanted us to take on his complaint.

### *Stage 2 (Director / Head of Communications and Engagement)*

In one case

- Although we did not uphold the complaint, we took the view that it may have helped in this case if at the start of the process we had more clearly explained, over and above the information that is already contained within our leaflets and on our website, the process that we follow. In particular how we gather, assess and comment on evidence. We made a recommendation to the senior management team (SMT) that we re-look at the information that is provided to complainants at the start of an investigation about our process in relation to gathering and assessing evidence.

In another case

- Although we had correctly and in a timely manner advised the complainant of the review process, we did not treat his complaint as such immediately and there was a delay of approximately two weeks in their request being passed to the review process. We upheld this complaint and apologised to the complainant for this.

### *Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)*

The ICCR did not uphold one complaint and partly upheld one complaint. The four aspects that were upheld were that SPSO did not timeously implement an ICCR recommendation for an apology; had not provided explanations requested (in part); did not inform the complainant of our intention to completely bypass the first stage of our complaints process and did not process the latest complaint within the required time periods.

The ICCR recommendations to SPSO were that we consider whether it would be appropriate in these circumstances to consider making a consolatory payment in recognition of our delay and the distress and inconvenience caused; and that we conduct a review of our response times to service complaints and reports our findings in a form that is accessible to public scrutiny.

We accepted the ICCR's findings and again apologised for the delays that occurred and the lack of fullness of our response. We also confirmed that we had identified learning from the complaint and amended our systems to ensure that such a failure should not happen again.

On the aspect relating to bypassing the first stage of our complaints process, we confirmed to the ICCR that our procedure is that we may take complaints at stage two straight away, and that these include 'those that are perhaps more complex and require more detailed investigation or where we feel it is otherwise appropriate to do so.' Our procedure sets out that where it is clear to us from the outset that the complaint will not be resolved at stage one, for example because of the amount of correspondence or the number of complaints, we feel it is fair to the complainant to escalate their complaint to stage two straight away. We view this as being in the best interests of the complainant.

On the matter of a consolatory payment, we explained that it is not our policy or practice to do so in cases where there has been no direct financial loss. We stated: “this does not mean that we in any way do not underestimate the issues identified through this complaint and we hope that we have shown clearly that we have learned from the complaint and taken steps to amend our systems to prevent recurrence.” On the matter of reviewing our response times to service complaints and reporting our findings in a form that is accessible to public scrutiny, we confirmed to the ICCR that we already do this on a quarterly and an annual basis. As a management team, we review these response times on a quarterly and an annual basis and that service complaints are a standing item on our internal Service Improvement Group. In terms of accessibility to public scrutiny, we also confirmed that we report these findings on our website and in our annual report which is discussed by the Scottish Parliament.

### **Service complaint handling performance**

Key points in terms of SPSO’s handling of customer service complaints:

Complaints numbers

- Complaints received and responded to by SPSO remained stable from the previous quarter

Timescales

- *Stage 1:* All seven complaints at stage 1 were responded to within the target of 5 working days (Q1 83%). The average timescales for responding to Stage 1 complaints was **3 working days** compared with 4.1 working days in Q1.
- *Stage 2:* All four complaints at stage 2 were responded to within the target of 20 working days. The average timescales for responding to stage 2 complaints was **19.5 working days**, compared with 23 working days in Q1.

### **Key learning points and trends**

There were no significant service failures identified in the complaints responded to in this period which indicated a concerning trend or requiring attention. The most common areas of complaint in quarter 2 were:

- *Communication:* Four complaints, the same as in the previous quarter, about elements of communication such as a failure to provide sufficient explanation for our decisions or to explain why we were dealing with a complaint at stage 2 of our customer complaints process.
- *Specific elements of our process:* Four complaints, one more than in the previous quarter, in particular about the depth of our investigatory work and about taking relevant information into account in making a decision not to take a complaint further.
- *Delay:* two complaints about delay, one more than the previous quarter.
- *Attitude:* two complaints about staff attitude, two more than the previous quarter.

### **Action Taken**

Individual instances of service failure have been highlighted to the SMT, where necessary, and to the relevant staff and managers involved. This paper will be provided to the Service Improvement Group for discussion and action where appropriate. There were no individual or collective training needs identified. As outlined above SMT will continue to monitor complaints about communication in future quarters to identify and highlight to the Service Improvement Group any action that may help ensure learning from this.

ICCR recommendations have been accepted and responded to as outlined above.

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