

**Organisation learning from Customer Service Complaints
2016-17 Q3**

From: Emma Gray, Head of Communications and Engagement
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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

Received

Summary	Early Resolution	Investigation	Total
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	2	2	4
Stage 2 - Senior Management	5	2	7
Stage 3 - ISDR	1	1	2
Total	8	5	13

We received 11 customer service complaints in Q3, a slight decrease on the 13 we received in Q2.

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

- 4 at Stage 1 Manager
- 7 at Stage 2 Senior Management

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

Complaints responded to

Responded to

Summary	Not Upheld	Some Upheld	Total
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	4	1	5
Stage 2 - Senior Management	4	1	5
Stage 3 – ISDR	1	1	2
Total	9	3	12

SPSO responded to 10 service complaints in this period. This is in line with the volumes of the previous six months.

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

- one of these complaints was received for a case closed at the Advice stage
- two of these complaints were received for cases at Early Resolution stage;
- two of these complaints were received for cases at Investigation stage.

Five were responded to at stage 2 (Head of Communications and Engagement):

- four of these complaints were received for cases at Early Resolution stage;
- one of these complaints was received for a case at Investigation stage.

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	Not Upheld	Some Upheld	Total	2016-17 Q3 % upheld	2016-17 Q2 % upheld	2016-17 Q1 % upheld	2015-16 % upheld
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	4	1	5	20%	14%	17%	13%
Stage 2 - Senior Management	4	1	5	20%	25%	33%	17%
Total	8	2	10	20%	18%	22%	15%
Stage 3 - ISDR	1	1	2	50%	50%	0%	44%
Total	9	3	12	25%	23%	20%	22%

Upheld complaints

Of the ten complaints responded to by SPSO in this period, two were partly upheld (20%). Eight (80%) were not upheld. This is in line with the upheld rate of the previous quarter. The ICCR responded to two complaints in Q3. One was not upheld and one was partly upheld (50%). 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 it was 44%. These percentages are on very small numbers, and upheld complaints includes those where one part of a complaint that consisted of several issues was upheld.

Service failures identified

Specific service failures identified in Quarter 3 are summarised below.

Stage 1 (Officer / Manager)

- We had not responded to an email sent by the complainant following his Request for Review (RfR). We upheld this aspect and apologised to the complainant. We also apologised for the delay in responding to their CSC request (see the learning points section below).

Stage 2 (Head of Communications and Engagement)

- We found that two aspects of a service complaint should have been dealt with under the CSC process rather than the RfR process, to which we had signposted the complainant. We apologised for this and reminded the staff concerned of the correct process (see the learning points section below).
- While we upheld a service complaint that the HOC did not reflect the complaint, we noted that the decision letter did acknowledge the actual complaint.

Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)

The ICCR did not uphold one complaint and partly upheld one complaint. The one aspect that was upheld was that the complainant only received an automated acknowledgement of his email. The ICCR decision stated: 'Although the Ombudsman's letter ... made it clear that there was no possibility of further review, the SPSO accepts that a final letter should have been issued to you confirming this position. The SPSO acknowledges that such a letter was not issued and apologises for this oversight.' The ICCR recommended that we issue the complainant with this closure letter, including an apology for not having done so previously, which we did.

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:* Three of the five complaints at stage 1 were responded to within the target of 5 working days and two were not. The average timescales for responding to Stage 1 complaints was **5.8 working days** (outwith our timescales of 5 working days) compared with 3 working days in Q2.
- *Stage 2:* All but one of the complaints at stage 2 were responded to within the target of 20 working days. The average timescales for responding to stage 2 complaints was **17.8 working days**, (within our timescales of 20 working days) compared with 19.5 working days in Q2.

Key learning points and trends

There were two learning points for us from complaints, both about our internal process. A complainant told us '...my completed Service Complaint form which was emailed to four different recipients at the SPSO, was not responded to for more than ten working days; it received a response only after further contact from myself. Supposedly all recipients forwarded the complaint to the wrong person; a person that seemingly decided to take no action to rectify the error.'

We realised this failing mistake only when we received a follow-up email from the complainant. At that point we apologised and considered the complaints straight away at stage 1. Inevitably this had caused the complainant additional frustration, and we committed to reminding colleagues that customer complaints should be dealt with by them and their manager at Stage 1 and passed to the Executive PA if it is at Stage 2.

The other learning point was that we told a complainant that two aspects of their complaint were for the review process, whereas they were about communication and should have been taken through the CSC process. We apologised to the complainant for this and again committed to reminding colleagues that if they are in any doubt, to send the correspondence to both the executive casework officer and Head of Communications and Engagement to ensure that it is handled under the correct process.

The most common areas of complaint in quarter 3 were:

- *Communication*: complaints that we had failed to provide sufficient explanation for our decisions; about the wording of HOCs; lack of a face-to-face meeting; why we had not shared information from a public body with the complainant.
- *Specific elements of our process*: complaints about the depth of our investigation before we made a decision not to take a complaint forwards on grounds of prematurity; why we had not held interviews with people named in the complaint.
- *Delay*: complaints that staff were frequently absent on leave; that we took too long
- *Attitude*: complaints that we were lacking in empathy; were biased in favour of a public body.

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. While there were no individual training needs identified, as outlined above staff should be reminded of our internal process for handling customer complaints. SMT will continue to monitor complaints to identify and highlight to the Service Improvement Group any action that may help ensure learning from this.

The ICCR recommendation was accepted and responded to as outlined above.
