

Report to: Audit and Advisory Committee

When: November 2015

From: Paul McFadden

For: Noting

Subject: Organisation learning from Customer Service Complaints Q2 2015-16

Status: FOR PUBLICATION

1. 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 three months from July to September (Q2 2015-16) 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.

2. Contribution to the Business Plan

Continuous improvement: on-going

3. 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.

4. Summary of complaints

4.1 Received

We received 15 customer service complaints in Q2. This is an **increase of 66%** on the previous quarter (9 received), which follows a **decrease of 55%** between Quarter 4 2014-15 and Quarter 1 2015/16. The Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR) received five complaints after our response at stage 2 (4 in the previous quarter).

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

- 6 at Stage 1 Manager
- 11 at Stage 2 Senior management (including two previously responded to at stage 1)
- 5 at Stage 3 Independent Customer Service Reviewer

4.2 Closed

SPSO responded to 20 service complaints in this period:

- 7 were responded to at stage 1 (Officer / Manager):
 - 5 responded to at Early Resolution; and

- 2 responded to at Investigations.
- **13** were responded to at stage 2 (Head of Complaints Standards)

The ICCR responded to **two** complaints.

4.3 Summary of complaints outcomes

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.

Type	Upheld	Not Upheld	Some Upheld	Total
Stage 1 - Officer / Manager	0	6	1	7
Stage 2 - Senior Management	0	11	2	13
Stage 3 - ISDR	0	1	1	2
Total	0	17	4	22

Of the 20 complaints responded to by SPSO in this period, **three (15%) were fully upheld or some upheld. 17(85%) were not upheld.** This is a similar overall upheld rate from to the Quarter 1 (12.5%) Overall upheld rates in 2014/15 were: 15% in Quarter 4 2014/15, 24% in Quarter 3, 25% in Quarter 2 and 33% in Q1 2014-15.

The ICCR responded to two complaints (both from the same complainant). One was not upheld, one was some upheld.

4.4 Service failures identified

Specific service failures identified in Quarter 2 were as follows:

Stage 1

- In one case we apologised for service failures identified in a telephone call. These had been identified by the member of staff involved prior to the complaint being raised. We agreed that the service the complainant received had fallen below that which they should expect and offered the complainant a full apology, which the complainant accepted.

Stage 2

- We apologised for the fact that our response to the complainant's request for review took longer than our target time of 20 working days, reiterating the Ombudsman's earlier apology for this.
- We apologised for a misunderstanding over provision of an email address and subsequent failure to communicate using this email address.

ICCR

- The ICCR identified failings in relation to part of a complaint brought by one complainant. These issues related to the process by which we defined the complaint and the criteria we have in our published material for requesting a review of a decision by the Ombudsman. The ICCR made the following recommendations:
 - that SPSO consider whether there is a need to take action, when there is a change of complaint reviewer, to ensure that confidence and understanding are maintained following the handover.
 - that SPSO consider whether it would be appropriate to expand its published guidance on decision reviews.

These recommendations are currently being considered by SMT for response by the end of November.

5. Service complaint handling performance

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

Complaints numbers

- Complaints responded to at stage 1 **decreased** from nine to seven on the previous quarter but was largely in line with previous quarters in 2014/15 (ten Q4, nine Q3, seven Q2 and eight Q1).
- Complaints responded to at stage 2 (13) **increased** from seven in the previous quarter (10 in quarter 4 2014/15).
- Complaints responded to by ICCR **reduced** from four to two on the previous quarter.

Timescales

- *Stage 1:* Five out of seven complaints (**71%**) at stage 1 were responded to within the target of 5 working days (Q1 55%; Q4 14/15 90%). The average timescales for responding to Stage 1 complaints was **6 working days**, which is above the 5 working day target and a decrease on performance in previous quarters where the target has been met.
- *Stage 2:* Nine out of thirteen complaints at stage 2 (**69%**) were responded to within the target of 20 working days, similar to the previous 2 quarters (70% each previous quarter). The average timescales for responding to Stage 1 complaints was **19.6 working days**. This was within the target of 20 working days.

6 Key learning points and trends

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

- *Communication:* **Five complaints to SPSO and one complaint to ICCR** complained about elements of communication such as failures to contact within agreed timescales, accuracy of communications or failure to explain elements of our process clearly. This was a reduction on eight in the previous quarter.
- *Specific elements of our process:* **Six complaints to SPSO and two to ICCR** involved some element of complaint about our process, including the process for agreeing heads of complaint or transferring complaints between CRs.
- *Delay:* **Six complaints to SPSO** involved some element of complaint about delays in either our complaints handling or responding to requests for review;

Other areas of complaints included how complainants were treated (4), whether we met the complainant's needs (4) and complaints of staff attitude (2).

7 Action Taken

Individual instances of service failure have been highlighted to 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.

ICCR recommendations are still being considered and we will report to A&AC on the outcomes in future quarterly reports, including whether we have accepted these and whether they have been, or are being, acted upon.

8 Recommendations

The AAC is invited to note this update.