

contents

1	Ombudsman's foreword	4
2	Role, vision and values	7
3	Strategic objectives and equalities commitments	8
4	Measuring performance and impact	10
5	Governance and risk management	11
6	Resources	12
	Annex 1	14
	Annex 2	15

1 Ombudsman's Foreword

Introduction

The Strategic Plan for 2012–2016 sets out our key objectives for the next four years based on anticipated changes in the external environment that impact on our work and areas identified for development within the business. As with previous plans, this Strategic Plan will be used to drive continuous improvement in the services that we provide to our stakeholders.

The five strategic objectives that we present here constitute our high-level Strategic Plan and under it will sit business plans for each year. The same values of independence, accountability, accessibility, efficiency, collaboration and diversity will continue to form a common thread through our work, underpinning all that we do. We are mindful of our responsibilities as a public body to fulfil our equalities obligations and that we have a role in ensuring that bodies under our jurisdiction also fulfil their obligations.

Our Plan places us squarely in the arena of supporting improvement by focussing public bodies on embedding good complaints procedures and on learning from complaints to identify and prevent future failings. This emphasis on prevention is one of the cornerstones of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services report (the Christie Commission) that was published in June 2011. We will continue to assess the impact of our decisions and our recommendations on public services and on policy, using tools such as thematic reports based on outcomes of our considerations of complaints. In doing this, we aim to ensure that the learning from complaints is used effectively to inform improvement in how services are designed and delivered.

A fit-for-purpose complaints handling service

Our first priority is to continue to provide a high quality complaints handling service that is continually accessible, effective and trusted by the public and other stakeholders. It is worth emphasising that the work of any Ombudsman's office is demand led. Last year we handled around 3,500 complaints, a number that increases each year, and is set to continue to rise as our remit widens. Our resource requirements, like many other public services, are therefore largely demand led. Around 45% of the complaints brought to us are premature. This means they have come to us before completing the complaints process of the body complained about or are about a matter or a body we cannot, by law, look at. We devote a significant amount of resource to providing advice, support and signposting to people with premature complaints. We are optimistic that our work with public bodies to standardise and simplify complaints handling procedures will, over time reduce the level of premature complaints.

Widening remit

During 2011–12 we are continuing to embed the new responsibilities conferred on us by the Scottish Parliamentary Commissions and Commissioners etc Act 2010 (SPCC etc Act) and the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (PSR Act). We worked closely with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Prisons Service, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) and the then Scottish Prison Complaints Commissioner's Office to ensure the smooth integration of prison complaints work into the SPSO in October 2010.

continued

In 2010–11, we also worked alongside Waterwatch and the Scottish Government to prepare for a smooth transition of water complaints to this office on 15 August 2011. We have actively participated in the Government's discussions and working groups about the future of police complaints and social work complaints. We are also contributing to one of the Making Justice Work projects in the context of people's access to justice and to the work of the Scottish Committee of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council. Further expansions of our role and remit, including an increase in powers to look at discretionary decisions in non-health areas where we already have such powers, are possibilities and ones for which we make as much preparation as we can in our Strategic Plan.

Complaints Standards Authority

The most significant recent addition to our role is the authority given to us under provisions in the PSR Act to lead the development of simplified, standardised complaint handling procedures (CHPs) across the public sector and to monitor and promote best practice. To carry out the new responsibilities, we established an internal unit, the Complaints Standards Authority. Its stated purpose is to support continuous improvement in complaint handling by guiding all public service providers towards a simplified, standardised complaints procedure, which puts the service user at the heart of the process, and values complaints as tools for feedback, learning and improvement.

Through streamlining the current procedures of public bodies the aim is also to improve efficiency and generate savings for the public purse. This work involves ensuring the development of and compliance with the principles of complaints handling and the model CHP appropriate to the sector. We are working with existing regulatory bodies to build compliance and performance

mechanisms into existing audit processes to avoid additional regulatory burden. We will also be developing support for complaints handlers through best practice guidance and training, including e-learning training for frontline staff throughout the public sector.

Powers and independence

As outlined above, our remit and role have changed over the past several years. Recently, a number of other legislative changes have affected aspects of our work. For example, provisions in the SPCB etc Act that came into force in April 2011 allowed us greater flexibility in how we publish decisions and therefore allowed us to make the learning from the majority of complaints we investigate widely available. Under provisions in the PSR Act, we, along with all the other bodies supported by the SPCB, are now subject to greater direction from the SPCB over some aspects of our corporate services. We are keen to continue to work with the SPCB to advance the shared services agenda. We have already achieved significant savings by sharing office space with, and providing other corporate services to, other offices that they support. It is likely that we will create or be presented with other possibilities for savings over the next four years, and this will impact on our work, for example in changing where and how we carry out some of our activities.

We have raised with the Parliament the lack of a mechanism for laying a special report under the SPSO Act. This is a matter of continuing and constructive debate with the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. Other than this, we do not anticipate any significant change to how we carry out our work.

In all matters relating to changes to our remit and powers and in how we carry out our work, we will continue to maintain and protect the independence (and perception of independence) of the SPSO – this is a fundamental pillar of all Ombudsmen's offices.

continued

National Performance Framework (NPF)

While maintaining our independence in terms of how we investigate complaints, we recognise our accountability to the SPCB and our responsibility to the Scottish people. We also acknowledge that we do not work in a vacuum. Our strategic objectives can be seen in relation to the Scottish National Performance Framework, in particular the national outcome of ensuring public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs. Our objectives can also be related to other outcomes, including the additional outcome announced in December 2011 relating to older people 'Our people are able to maintain their independence as they get older and are able to access appropriate support when they need it'. There are several NPF indicators that our work is directly relevant to – for example, our Complaints Standards Authority aims to 'improve the responsiveness of public services' and 'improve people's perceptions of the quality of public services' by assuring that complaints processes are accessible, timely, robust and transparent. In our work in the NHS, the recommendations that we make for redress and improvement can be related to indicators such as 'improve end of life care', 'improve the quality of healthcare experience' and 'improve support for people with care needs'.

The Plan

It is difficult to predict how the diversification into the Complaints Standards Authority combined with other influencing factors on public services such as the ongoing economic climate might combine to impact on the number and type of complaints reaching this office over time.

This Strategic Plan will take us past the ten year mark for the establishment of the office in 2002. Many of the challenges of an Ombudsman's office remain perennial ones that require an ongoing focus no matter how well established the office is, such as:

- maintaining an efficient complaints system without compromising on quality. Quality assurance is key to ensuring the work of the office is delivered efficiently but is also proportionate, risk based and leads to balanced, evidence based decisions;

- regularly reviewing how we explain and provide clarity on the role and powers of an Ombudsman (for example in relation to the fact that the Ombudsman represents the final point of challenge for decisions made, short of judicial review), as well as seek opportunities to keep under review whether these roles and powers reflect what is required by our different stakeholders;
- making significant contributions to the development of public services as well as providing redress for individuals. An Ombudsman's service can do this through incisive and appropriately challenging recommendations that fit the unique circumstances of each individual case and which also highlight systemic issues;
- managing the inherent tension between the need to provide redress for the individual through private investigation and the good practice of publicising learning to drive public service improvement; and
- continually reviewing our commitment and approach to equality, in particular in light of the Equalities Act 2010.

Underpinning our work is an effective performance management system with clear performance indicators and an ongoing commitment to the development of our people through, for example, our work towards Investors in People.

Delivering our objectives in the current economic climate will require creativity and collaboration. There are serious financial challenges ahead for all of us in the public sector. The SPSO has already taken steps to do more with less, and by working in partnership with others to simplify and standardise complaints handling procedures in the public sector we have an opportunity to make overall savings to the public purse.

I believe this Strategic Plan represents a realistic framework for moving forwards over the next 4 year period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have supported us with this work, in particular my own staff who have continued to deliver on all of our ongoing commitments and objectives.

Jim Martin, Ombudsman

2 Role, vision and values

Role

The legislative role of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, as set out in the SPSO Act 2002, now sits alongside the additional duties arising from the new legislation passed in 2010. The key function flowing from the Act continues to be to undertake independent investigations into complaints from members of the public about service failure and maladministration by Scottish public services. These complaints can be about both the delivery of a service or the application of a policy and the subsequent handling of a complaint about that service. The SPSO Act also makes special provisions in health complaints to investigate complaints about clinical judgement.

The related but equally critical role of the Ombudsman to share the lessons that are learned through individual complaints more broadly and identify systemic issues will now have a legislative footing based on the requirements of the PSR Act to encourage best practice. The PSR Act also provides the new role of overseeing the simplification and standardisation of complaints handling procedures across the whole of the public sector.

Our vision

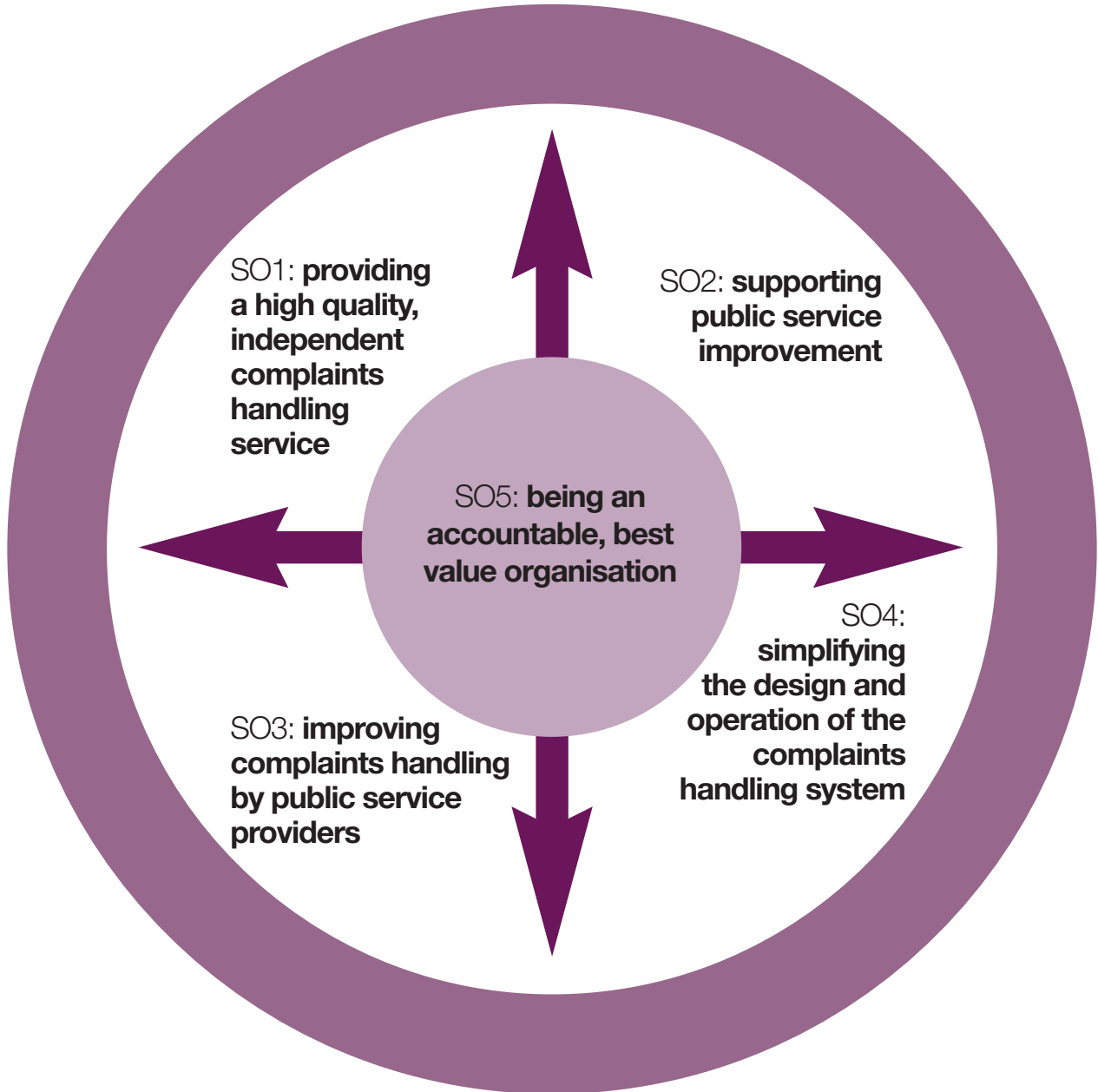
Our vision going forwards into this Strategic Plan remains of enhanced public confidence in high quality, continually improving public services in Scotland which consistently meet the highest standards of public administration. We continue to aim to bring this about by providing a trusted, effective and efficient complaint handling service which remedies injustice for individuals resulting from maladministration or service failure whilst at the same time leading on the development of best practice.

Values

We do our best to follow the seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. These are sometimes referred to as the ‘Nolan principles’. In line with these principles in our Strategic Plan 2012–16 we aim to be:

- independent, impartial, fair and evidence based in responding to complaints;
- accountable, open and proportionate about our work and governance, ensuring stakeholders understand our role and have confidence in our work;
- accessible and respectful to all, responsive to the needs and rights of our users: complainants and service providers;
- exemplars of efficient and effective complaint handling;
- collaborative in our work with service providers, policy makers and other stakeholders sharing our learning to achieve improvement;
- a best value organisation which is efficient, effective, flexible, makes good use of resources, and is committed to enabling and developing a diverse workforce who can provide excellent service.

3 Strategic Objectives 2012-2016



The high level objectives for the office maintain the focus on our 5 key strands of work.

Strategic objective 1:

To provide a high quality, user-focussed independent complaints handling service

By developing our capacity as complaints handlers to be able to deliver individual benefit to our customers; by being accessible and dealing with all enquiries and complaints impartially, consistently, effectively, proportionately and in a timely manner; and by producing clear, accurate and influential decisions about complaints.

Strategic objective 2:

To support public service improvement in Scotland

By continuing to raise informed awareness of the role of the SPSO and to feed back and capitalise on the learning from our consideration of individual enquiries and complaints, for example, through thematic reports, and by working in partnership with public service deliverers, policy makers, scrutiny bodies and regulators to promote good administrative practice.

Strategic objective 3:

To improve complaints handling by public service providers

By using our expertise and resources to monitor, promote and facilitate the sharing of best practice and support service providers in improving their complaints handling.

Strategic objective 4:

To simplify the design and operation of the complaints handling system in Scottish public services

By working in partnership with service providers, regulators and other key stakeholders to facilitate the development of and compliance with simplified, standardised and user-focussed Complaints Handling Procedures across the public sector as an integral part of the wider administrative justice system in Scotland.

Strategic objective 5:

To be an accountable, best value organisation

By making best use of our resources and demonstrating continuous improvement in our operational efficiency and supporting the professional development of our staff.

Equalities commitments

Our five equalities commitments form an integral part of the Strategic Plan. They are:

- 1** to take proactive steps to identify and reduce potential barriers to ensure that our service is accessible to all.
- 2** to identify common equality issues (explicit and implicit) within complaints brought to our office and feed back learning from such complaints to all stakeholders.
- 3** to ensure that we inform people who are taking forward a complaint of their rights and of any available support, and that we encourage public authorities to do the same.
- 4** to ensure that we play our part in ensuring that service providers understand their duties to promote equality within their complaints handling procedures.
- 5** to monitor the diversity of our workforce and supply chain and take positive steps where under-representation exists.

4 Measuring performance and impact

The SPSO has developed a range of performance measures. These are reviewed and developed on an annual basis and focus on outcomes rather than activities. These measures map against the five strategic objectives and are there to support decision making at a strategic and operational level and provide a measure for monitoring business performance against targets.

Performance against these measures is reported on a quarterly basis to the Senior Management Team and to the Audit and Advisory Committee at least three times a year. A report is then published on an annual basis summarising key aspects of performance.

Strategic objectives and primary performance measures:

1 Providing a high quality, independent complaints handling service

- > Case time and age profile targets
- > Quality assurance measures
- > User satisfaction measures

2 Supporting public service improvement

- > Meeting our stated commitments to raise awareness of our role and publicise learning from complaints

3 Improving complaints handling practices

- > With key partners, build networks of complaints handlers for all sectors
- > Develop the Valuing Complaints website as a platform for sharing best practice
- > Effectiveness of training provision

4 Simplifying the design and operation of complaints handling systems

- > Publish model CHPs for all sectors and support bodies to implement them
- > Establish compliance and performance monitoring measures for all sectors

5 Being an accountable, best value organisation

- > Audit findings
- > Financial performance measures
- > Staff satisfaction
- > Workforce statistics
- > ICT performance information
- > Environmental impact assessments

5 Governance and risk management

The SPSO lays 4-yearly strategic plans and annual reports before the Scottish Parliament. As part of the preparation of the 4-yearly plans, we invite and consider comment from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and any other relevant stakeholders we think appropriate, such as relevant committees of the Scottish Parliament.

The Ombudsman also gives evidence annually to Scottish Parliamentary Committees as required on the findings of the work of the SPSO and holds discussions with the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) about the SPSO budget submission each year.

The SPSO Audit and Advisory Committee (A&AC) works with the Ombudsman as a non-executive group, advising on the discharge of the functions of the Accountable Officer. The A&AC support the Ombudsman (as Accountable Officer) and the Senior Management Team in monitoring the adequacy of the SPSO's governance and control systems through offering objective advice on issues concerning the risk, control and governance of the SPSO and associated assurances provided by audit and other related processes. The A&AC also provide a source of advice and feedback on SPSO Strategic Objectives and annual business plans.

The SPSO is governed by a formal Scheme of Control and Scheme of Delegation. The Ombudsman, as Accountable Officer for the SPSO, has responsibility for maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of organisational policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding the public funds and the organisation's assets for which he is responsible. The system of internal control will continue to evolve to identify the principal risks to the achievement of the organisation's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the nature and extent of those risks and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

6 Resources

Overview

The SPSO has a number of statutory duties including:

- investigating complaints brought by members of the public about public bodies under our jurisdiction
- publishing findings of decisions and investigations
- providing complaints handling principles, that are supported by published complaints handling standards; and
- promoting and monitoring best practice in complaints handling.

Delivering these specific outcomes in a demand led environment requires effective management of all resources as well as flexibility to reflect change in demand. Over the course of this Strategic Plan the SPSO will seek to operate within the funding available, closely monitoring resources and ensuring value for money whilst at the same time meeting our stated legislative and strategic objectives, where required.

Timetable

The five strategic objectives set out in this Plan reflect our current statutory obligations and the related core functions to be delivered by the SPSO over the 4 year period up to March 2016.

In summary, these are:

- SO1** Providing a high quality, timely and independent complaints handling service
- SO2** Ensuring compliance with recommendations and publishing good practice from casework
- SO3** Facilitating good practice in complaints handling
- SO4** Simplifying complaints handling systems in Scotland

- SO5** Delivering continuous improvement in service and efficiency to SPSO

Having integrated a number of new areas of work into SPSO in 2010–11 and 2011–12, it is predicted that the split of current resources across these core functions will remain constant throughout the 4 year period of the Strategic Plan. Any further additions or extensions to the SPSO remit would require a review of this.

Budget

SPSO operates against an annual cash based budget that is reviewed by the SPCB and approved by the Scottish Parliament, with access to contingency arrangements where necessary.

The approved budget for 2010–11 was £3,261,000, excluding costs associated with its new functions. Over the three year period between 2010–11 and 2013–14 the SPSO is committed to achieving as a minimum a 15% real terms decrease in its budget and is on target to do so.

The 2011–12 budget represented a 6.5% saving on the 2010–11 baseline budget, largely achieved through a restructuring of the organisation. The budget requirement for the year 2012–13, as stated in cash terms, is £3,327,517 million, a 6% decrease on the refreshed 2011–12 baseline budget.

The indicative figures for 2013–14, which have been provided to the SPCB as part of the 2012–13 budget process, show a further planned reduction of 2.7%.

These savings have been achieved whilst at the same time integrating new areas of jurisdiction, taking on additional duties leading to the development of new services, and improving productivity of case handling. They have also been achieved through a shared services arrangement for premises and utilities with the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

Indicative Costs

These indicative figures are presented in the context of the above budgetary changes and improvements in efficiency.

Indicative figures for each year of the Strategic Plan are set out in Annex 1, on the assumption that the SPSO's legal duties and strategic objectives can be achieved with the resources set at the level reflected in the 2013–14 budget. This means that specific increases, for example through inflationary pressures, will be met through further savings. These indicative figures would potentially be impacted on by rising demands for service or additional jurisdictional or legal responsibilities. These estimates do not include contingencies, for example for legal challenges.

Annex 2 shows the indicative costs for 2012–13 aligned to strategic objectives. Approximately 70% of staff resources are 100% dedicated to delivering strategic objective 1. Only 2 Full Time Equivalent staff have no direct involvement in statutory duties relating to the SPSO Act (their roles fulfil other statutory obligations e.g. relating to health and safety and employment legislation).

No significant capital projects are planned in the next four year period, unless there are clear efficiency savings to be made, for example through the progression of the shared services agenda alongside the SPCB.

Annex 1: SPSO Indicative figures 2012-2016 per budget heading

Item	Note	Budget Bid 2012 – 13	Estimated 2013 – 14	Indicative 2014 – 15	Indicative 2015 – 16
Staff Costs			Total	Total	Total
Total					
Ombudsman	1	£111,763	£109,002	£109,002	£109,002
Management staff costs		£438,277	£427,452	£427,452	£427,452
Complaints & investigations team		£1,503,718	£1,466,577	£1,478,273	£1,478,273
Policy & comms team		£155,432	£151,593	£139,888	£139,888
Corporate services team		£211,227	£206,009	£206,009	£206,009
Headcount reduction		-£66,154	-£59,793		
Total Staff Costs		£2,420,417	£2,360,633	£2,360,624	£2,360,624
Staff Related Costs		£80,500	£78,512	£78,512	£78,512
Property Costs		£292,500	£285,275	£285,275	£285,275
Professional Fees		£163,000	£158,974	£158,974	£158,974
Running Costs		£271,000	£264,306	£264,306	£264,306
Total Revenue Costs		£3,227,417	£3,147,700	£3,147,700	£3,147,700
Income		-£70,000	-£68,271	-£68,271	-£68,271
Capital Expenditure		£15,000	£14,630	£14,630	£14,630
Waterwatch revenue		£120,000	£112,500	£112,500	£112,500
Total Capital & Revenue		£3,292,417	£3,206,558	£3,206,558	£3,206,558

Notes: 1 The Ombudsman's salary is determined by the SPCB

Annex 2: SPSO Indicative figures 2012-2016 per strategic objective

Budget head	SO1. Case handling	SO2. Compliance and publication	SO3. Good practice	SO4. Simplification	SO5. Continuous improvement	Total costs
Office holder staff costs	£84,466	£6,800	£4,750	£5,587	£10,161	£111,763
Management staff costs	£221,527	£71,843	£37,077	£64,329	£43,501	£438,277
Non management staff costs	£1,583,718	£73,486	£64,432	£55,074	£173,667	£550,040
Total staff costs (exc officeholder)	£1,805,245	£145,329	£101,509	£119,403	£217,168	£2,388,654
% staff costs (exc officeholder)	75.58%	6.08%	4.25%	5.00%	9.09%	100.00%
Staff related costs	£64,617	£5,202	£3,633	£4,274	£7,773	£85,500
Property costs	£221,059	£17,796	£12,430	£14,621	£26,593	£292,500
Professional fees	£134,525	£10,830	£7,564	£8,898	£16,183	£178,000
Running costs	£214,257	£17,249	£12,048	£14,171	£25,775	£283,500
Capital costs	£17,005	£1,369	£956	£1,125	£2,046	£22,500
Income-£52,903	-£52,903	-£4,259	-£2,975	-£3,499	-£6,364	-£70,000
Total £2,488,271	£2,488,271	£200,315	£139,916	£164,580	£299,335	£3,292,417
% of budget	76%	6%	4%	5%	9%	100%



SPSO
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

Tel **0800 377 7330**
Fax **0800 377 7331**
Text **0790 049 4372**
Web **www.spsso.org.uk**
CSA **www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk**