

News | May 2026

A word from the Ombudsman

The last few months have marked a period of significant change for the nation.

A new Holyrood term has begun and MSPs have taken their oaths. It was an honour to be invited to attend the recent Kirking of the Scottish Parliament and to meet many of our new and returning MSPs. The sense of change was clear, bringing with it some uncertainty, but also a welcome opportunity to embrace new possibilities.

I am very much looking forward to engaging positively and proactively with the Parliament and its committees, bringing SPSO's insights on public services to inform the full range of Parliament's work. With over 8,000 citizens bringing complaints, whistleblowing concerns or requests for reviews to SPSO in the last year alone, there is immense potential for SPSO's insights to help shed light on how public services are delivered.

Our recently published annual statistics again highlight the significant challenge we continue to face responding to the increasing demand from those members of the public seeking our help.

Complaints to SPSO about public services rose by a further 31% in the last year, reaching another record level of over 6,500. This represents a further acceleration of a sustained long-term trend. Our modelling of current demand suggests that between 7,500 and 8,500 people are expected to seek our help this year. To put that in context, in 2024-25 we received just over 5,000 complaints. Going further back to the start of the current demand trend, the range was between 3,500 and 4,300 which really highlights the scale of the challenge.

This is a pressure I know is felt more widely across public services. In the face of challenges and strain on services, it is important that we all make sure that robust and person-centred complaints handling remains a priority as we seek to not only

address issues early but ensure we are identifying lessons, patterns and themes which can inform system learning and improve services.

52% of our recently published investigations show evidence of poor complaints handling. These issues can have fundamental, negative impacts on complainants' lives and wellbeing.

In one case published this month ([202401974](#)), a family made life changing decisions based on uncertainties around a potentially terminal cancer diagnosis. They then had to go through a lengthy complaints process, adding unnecessary strain at a deeply distressing time, despite clear opportunities to identify failings much earlier.

As Ombudsman, I see issues in complaints handling like this frequently and I am determined to use our unique vantage point to drive improvement.

I hope you find this newsletter helpful and welcome your thoughts on future content:

[Feedback survey](#)

Public service complaints

Key figures¹ from the last three months:

- 1,850 complaints received, a 37% increase on the same period last year
 - 32% about local authorities
 - 31% about health
 - 10% about housing associations
- 3,977 enquiries to our first contact team, a 38% increase
- 1,666 complaints closed with 651 closed following preliminary or statutory investigation

Since March, we have published 31 decisions of full investigations. These cases demonstrate both the severity and breadth of the issues we handle, with findings ranging from misdiagnosis and delays in healthcare to the administrative handling of benefit payments.

¹ Figures are unaudited and subject to revision

In one case, we found failings in how Midlothian Council managed the end of an adoptive placement due to irreconcilable behavioural difficulties and a breakdown in the relationship. The findings included weaknesses in the accuracy of assessment reports, information sharing between authorities, and the involvement of the adoptive parent in ongoing care planning.

Our recommendations focused on improving decision making and governance, including ensuring that reports are balanced, evidence-based, and fully reflect all relevant information, and that clear processes are in place for case transfer, independent oversight, and post-placement review.

This case highlights the role our work plays in improving how services make and record decisions affecting vulnerable children, helping to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and better outcomes in future.

Beyond our published cases, we also carry out a significant volume of work at the preliminary investigation stage. Preliminary investigations enable us to target issues that may be able to be resolved earlier. This helps support quicker decisions for complainants, speeds up learning and improvement in public services, and ensures that the most serious or complex cases are subject to full independent investigation.

We developed our online complaints checker to provide complainants with quicker access to the information they need, supporting earlier engagement with our service and helping people understand their options from the outset.

[Read case 202401604](#)

[Read our latest findings](#)

Scottish Welfare Fund

Last month, we made 92 decisions, 27 on community care grants and 65 on crisis grants. In one case, we instructed the council to award funds to an individual to buy clothing following their release from prison, to support their reintegration into the community.

[Read our latest findings](#)

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer

This month the INWO published two decision reports. In one case, we were pleased to reach a resolution between the whistleblower and the health board that addressed the patient safety concerns raised.

[Read our latest findings](#)

Annual statistics

Our 2025-26 statistics are now available to view online. These detail the breakdown of public service complaints, Scottish Welfare Fund reviews and NHS whistleblowing complaints we have received and closed over the past year.

- [Public service complaints](#)
 - [Scottish Welfare Fund reviews](#)
 - [Whistleblowing complaints](#)
-

Speak Up Week 2026: Save the date!

Speak Up Week 2026 will run from **Monday 28 September to Friday 2 October**.

This year marks a key milestone in 5 years of the National Whistleblowing Standards. In light of this, we are pleased to announce this year's theme:

“Five Years of the Whistleblowing Standards – What’s Changed? What’s Next?”

Keep an eye out for more updates in the weeks and months to come!

If you were previously subscribed to our INWO e-bulletin, you may notice a few changes. We have merged it with our other newsletter into a single publication, giving everyone access to updates from across the organisation.

Training

Complaints Investigation Skills

Our trainer-led course will equip participants with the knowledge to conduct robust investigations, ask the right questions, assess evidence, and make informed decisions.

Book your spot now:

- [Monday 1 June](#) – **last chance!**
- [Tuesday 2 June](#) – **last chance!**
- [Tuesday 1 September](#)
- [Wednesday 2 September](#)
- [Monday 30 November](#)
- [Tuesday 1 December](#)

Good Complaints Handling

Our Good Complaints Handling online training self-guided course is aimed at staff handling complaints at stage 1 of the [Model Complaints Handling Procedure \(MCHP\)](#) but would be useful for anyone involved in complaints handling looking to develop their knowledge.

The course takes around 45 minutes to complete and costs £50 per person.

[Book now](#)

Child Friendly Complaints

Our Child Friendly Complaints online training is tailored for complaints handlers and frontline staff. The course shows how organisations can put children and young people's rights at the heart of the complaints process.

The course takes around 45 minutes to complete and costs £50 per person.

[Book now](#)
