Note of the 6th SPSO Customer Sounding Board Meeting
held on Thursday 30 June 2016
at SPSO, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh

Present

Board:

Jim Martin  Ombudsman, SPSO (Chair)
Carol Greer  Citizens Advice Scotland
Gail Walker  Citizens Advice Scotland
Gina Alexander  Patient Opinion Scotland
Graeme Morrison  Alliance Scotland
Pete White  Positive Prison? Positive Futures…
Shaben Begum  SIAA (Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance)

Attendees:

Alison Jack  Scottish Welfare Fund Manager
Carol Neill  Advice Team Manager
Emma Gray  Head of Communications and Engagement
Francesca Richards  Complaint Standard Authority Officer
Gary Elliot  Complaints Reviewer
Jamie McGrandles  Executive Casework Officer

Apologies:

Ciaran McDonald  Age Scotland

1. The Ombudsman welcomed attendees to the sixth meeting of the sounding board. The note of the meeting held on 5 November 2015 was agreed with no amendments.

The Ombudsman thanked those who had taken the time to offer feedback on SPSO’s strategic plan and updated the board on wider feedback received, particularly:

- SOLACE and SOLAR had both fed back that consideration should be given for charging members of the public for using the SPSO service. Board members strongly opposed this suggestion.
- SPSO learning and improvement unit – the proposal has gained a great deal of support and is being developed by SPSO.

2. Update from the Ombudsman

(i) JR55 implications

The Ombudsman provided background on the judgement given by the Supreme Court in the matter of an application by JR55 for Judicial Review (Northern Ireland). It was noted that there were no direct implications for SPSO from this decision.
(ii) Annual letters
It was noted that annual letters would soon be issued from SPSO which would detail organisations’ complaints performance.

(iii) Prison complaints
Niki Maclean, Director, has been approached by the office of the Ombudsman for Ireland, to learn more about SPSO’s experience in extending jurisdiction to consider prison complaints. The Irish Ombudsman are keen to learn more with a view to similarly extending their remit.

4. Communications and Engagement Update:
Emma Gray, Head of Communications and Engagement updated on the work of her team.

(i) Learning and Improvement Unit
Consultation on SPSO’s draft strategic plan received a positive response around the proposal to set up a learning and improvement unit (LIU) and development of the unit is now underway. It aims to enhance the impact of our work by helping authorities improve public services through learning from complaints. Funding for a one-year pilot of the LIU has been secured, until the end of March 2017.

Responsibilities will include:

- supporting public authorities to take the necessary responsibility and actions to handle complaints well and to reduce the occurrence of repeat mistakes.
- reinforcing the work currently undertaken by our Complaints Standards Authority to ensure that SPSO recommendations support principles, model complaints handling procedures and good practice.
- advising on, developing and tracking SPSO recommendations for consistency and knowledge management.

Gail Walker commended SPSO for their spirit of inventiveness in developing this unit and supported creating an atmosphere where organisations see recommendations as having a positive impact on improving services.

Carol Greer offered any support from PASS in the development of the unit that the SPSO would find helpful.

(ii) Customer Survey
Gary Elliot introduced himself to the board as chair of SPSO’s customer survey analysis group. Gary detailed a summary of findings from the customer survey which have been analysed for Q1&2, 2015.

The group noted recommendations that have been made by the analysis group following detailed consideration of survey results:

- Cases are not to be transferred between CRs unless this is absolutely necessary. When a case is transferred there should be a clear explanation about the reasons for this.
- Examples of informative updates identified during SPSO’s quality assurance process are shared widely with staff.
All staff are reminded that complaints raised about our service should be recorded and dealt with under the customer service complaints process.

All staff are reminded on providing assistance to complainants who need help to submit a complaint.

Positive comments from the survey are circulated to staff to make staff aware of the positive impact of SPSO’s service.

Jamie McGrandles also advised that he planned to propose that an explanation of SPSO’s decision was wherever possible, communicated over the phone or that the complainant is offered the opportunity to discuss over the phone. Carol Greer and Gina Alexander encouraged this practice as good customer service.

Gina Alexander queried how the results of the survey will be publicly reported. Emma Gray advised that SPSO’s Annual Report 2015/16 will feature a section on the survey and that the findings and actions will be published around the same time as the Annual Report.

Pete White offered support to SPSO in developing a survey to receive feedback from prisoners.

(iii) Customer Forum

Emma Gray updated the team on the development of a customer forum and reference group.

Emma explained that a group would be established to provide feedback on SPSO’s service in a discussion forum setting. There were also plans for an online reference group to provide feedback on SPSO’s communications materials. The forum will mainly consist of members of the public who have recently used SPSO’s service, and may include a member of the PASS. The Local Government Ombudsman have had a similar forum in place for a number of years and have found the forum’s feedback and views to be very helpful.

Carol Greer agreed to speak to the PASS Co-ordinator to suggest that a PASS advocate member joins the group.

5. Scottish Welfare Fund update

From 1 April 2016, SPSO expanded its jurisdiction and has a new role as the independent reviewer for Scottish Welfare Funds under the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015.

The board were introduced to Alison Jack, who gave an overview of the process and the work of her team.

6. Complaint Standards Authority update to include:

(i) NHS model Complaint Handling Procedures (CHP)

Francesca Richards gave an update on the development of a model CHP for the NHS and the work of three groups established to support the implementation of the model CHP by 1 April 2017:

- Steering group
- Data and recording group
• Learning and training group

SPSO will work closely with NHS Education Scotland to deliver a programme of activities to support implementation including, e-learning tools, podcasts, webinars and master classes for senior management.

Gina Alexander asked for any feedback on the engagement of NHS boards so far. Francesca advised that there are two boards keen to implement this process earlier than April 2017.

(ii) Social Work Complaints
Francesca updated the board on the extension to SPSO’s role with social work complaints, in line with the Public Services Reform (Social Work Complaints Procedure) Scotland Order 2016. New powers will allow SPSO to look at actions taken by social workers and consider the merit of social work decisions, not just issues related to how the complaints have been handled.

SPSO are working closely with stakeholders to develop a model complaint handling procedure, this new process will be implemented on 1 April 2017.

7. AOCB
Shaben Begum advised that she was a member of the steering group for the National Care Standards Review and had been advocating the importance of good complaint handling.