

**Customer Survey Quarter 2 (July-September 2016)  
Analysis February 2017**

**Purpose**

To provide details of the findings of the customer survey results for Quarter 2 (July-September 2016).

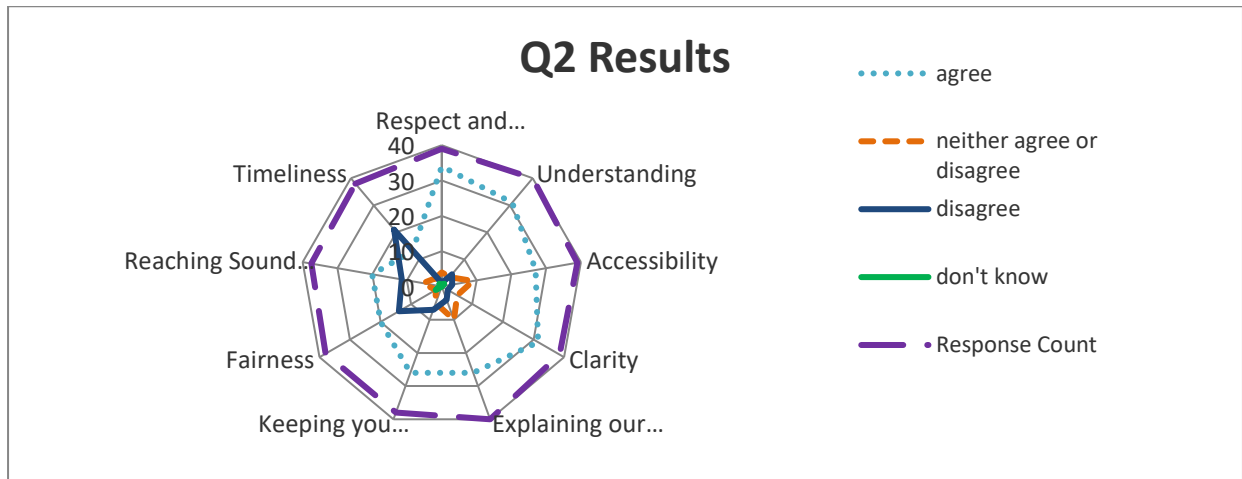
**Key Findings**

2.1 Response Rate

<b>Fig. 1</b>	<b>Q1 16/17</b>			<b>Q2 16/17</b>			
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Surveys Returned</b>	<b>Surveys Issued</b>	<b>% of total returned</b>	<b>Surveys Returned</b>	<b>Surveys Issued</b>	<b>% of total returned</b>	<b>Diff.</b>
not upheld	24	90	52%	12	66	29%	-23
some upheld	12	39	26%	13	48	32%	+6
fully upheld	10	49	22%	16	46	39%	+17
<b>Overall</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100%</b>	

41 out of 160 forms issued for cases closed in Quarter 2 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 25.6%. This compares to a rate of 25.8% in Quarter 1 and 26.2% in the year 2015-2016. As can be seen in the above table, there was a considerable increase in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints fully upheld this quarter compared to Quarter 1 and a considerable decrease in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints not upheld. We will consider this further below.

## 2.2 Satisfaction against service standards



**Fig. 2**

	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	don't know	Response Count
Respect and Dignity	34	4	1	0	39.0
Understanding	31	3.5	4.5	1	40.0
Accessibility	27	9	3	0	39
Clarity	31.5	5	2	0	39
Explaining our Scope	26	10	4	0	40
Keeping you informed	26	5	7	0	38
Fairness	20	2	14	2	38
Reaching Sound Outcomes	20	5.5	11.5	0.5	38
Timeliness	13	3	21	1	38

As can be seen above, in line with most previous Quarters, satisfaction rates against service standards were generally high with the main exceptions being timeliness, fairness and reaching sound outcomes. There are two questions in the customer survey that relate to reaching sound outcomes. The main dissatisfaction was in relation to the question about the outcome of the complaint rather than a question about whether they were given a clear explanation for our decision. It is also worth highlighting the positive responses received in relation to respect and dignity and clarity.

## 2.3 Comparison against Quarter 1

Figure 3 compares the satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in Quarter 1 of 2016/2017, with satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in Quarter 2 of 2016/2017.

**Fig. 3**

SPSO statement	SPSO Q1 16/17 % agree	SPSO Q2 16/17 % agree	Difference
Staff treated me with courtesy	77.8	87.5	+9.7
Staff listened to me and understood my complaint	47.7	75	+27.3
I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service	50	69.2	+19.2
SPSO checked what I wanted to happen	56.8	80	+23.2
It was clearly explained to me how my complaint would be handled	62.8	89.7	+26.9
SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me	62.8	65	+2.2
I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed	65.1	68.4	+3.3
SPSO communication with me was clear	67.4	73.7	+6.3
SPSO staff treated me respectfully	78.6	86.8	+8.2
I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly	39.5	52.6	+13.1
I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)	55.8	64.9	+9.1
The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable	25.6	34.2	+8.6

Figure 3 shows that there has been an increase in the satisfaction rate for every statement this Quarter. This is reassuring in view of the dip in satisfaction rates in Quarter 1. A number of the statements had even higher satisfaction rates than those for 2015-2016. It is likely that this is due to the increase in the proportion of surveys completed by respondents who had their complaints fully upheld.

The satisfaction rates for the statements from respondents who had their complaints fully upheld were extremely high. All were 80%+ with the exception of timeliness. For the other statements, in general, there was only one person who disagreed with each of the statements. There were a number of positive comments from these respondents, which will be considered below. However, there were also negative comments about the time taken, that we had not investigated specific items and that we were biased.

Some of the satisfaction rates for respondents who had some of their complaints upheld were relatively low. In particular, only 38.5% of respondents agreed that their complaint was dealt with fairly; and that we told them what outcomes we may or may not be able to achieve for them (this was much lower than the figure of 75% for respondents who did not have their complaint upheld). In addition, only 46.2% agreed that they were provided with the support they needed from SPSO to access our services (we will consider this further below); that they were given a clear explanation for our decision; and that they were told clearly how their complaint was being progressed (this figure was 75% for respondents who did not have their complaint upheld). There were also some negative comments about the time taken and about how the investigation was carried out. We have considered both of these issues in previous Quarters.

For complaints that were not upheld, the satisfaction rates were extremely high for some statements. 91.7% of respondents agreed that it was clearly explained to them how their complaint would be handled and 83.3% agreed they were treated with courtesy and respectfully. However, only 33.3% of respondents agreed that their complaint was dealt with fairly and there were also some negative comments about the investigation. This ties in with the comments we made in the analysis of Quarter 1 that, although complainants will be disappointed if (some of) their complaints are not upheld, it is for us to decide how the investigation is to be carried out.

#### 2.4 Timeliness

As with previous Quarters, one of the most prevalent subject matter for comments was timeliness. In the majority, the comments about time taken were negative. However, one respondent commented that, 'The time taken to deal with the complaint was not the fault of the SPSO, it rather reflected that complexity of the complaint and issues with the [organisation] complained about' and another said that 'I was happy with the time taken to investigate...'

On the other hand, one respondent stated that, 'I really did not understand the timeframe for dealing with complaints at the beginning and this could be stressed at the start of an investigation.' This links with a previous recommendation we made that further information about possible timescales and our approach to reaching decisions should be added to the introduction letters from both the Early Resolution and Investigations Teams.

The average days open figure<sup>1</sup> (the number of working days SPSO required to deal with a case) for cases closed after investigation for Quarter 2 was 170. The equivalent figure<sup>2</sup> for cases closed in Quarter 1 16/17 was 160: a difference of 10 working days. However, this did not cause the percentage agreement to drop to a lower level than Quarter 1. As noted in Figure 3, the figure for Quarter 2 of 34.2% compares favourably to 25.6% in Quarter 1. It is not possible to draw many inferences from this result, other than to note that time taken to deal with complaints is not the only factor in customer satisfaction with timescales.

#### 2.5 Positive comments

We received a range of positive comments from respondents, some of which expressed satisfaction with the outcome, and some of which praised the way we handled the complaint. Whilst many of the positive comments were from respondents whose complaints were upheld, some comments from respondents who had received other outcomes included: '[The complaints reviewer] was absolutely fantastic. Incredibly patient and compassionate, excellent listener and really made me feel like she cared about my concerns...' and 'I didn't feel the need to chase up the SPSO. I felt confident that things were being worked through in an appropriate manner.'

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<sup>1</sup> Average figure calculated from 159 cases closed in this period, which compares to 160 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 0.6%

<sup>2</sup> Average figure calculated from 184 cases closed in this period, which compares to 178 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 3%

It was notable that a number of respondents commented on staff courtesy, and others referred to respectfulness. This itself was encouraging, and was supported by the overall high levels of agreement with the statements about courtesy and respect. In view of these positive comments about the way our staff communicate with complainants, we were reassured that the concern about misuse of language raised by one respondent in the Quarter 1 survey was not indicative of a wider issue.

### 2.6 Updates

A number of respondents referred to our process of providing updates during investigation. Some examples of this include: 'They kept me well informed'; 'I was happy to be updated with my complaint as the investigator phoned me on a monthly basis'; 'Monthly updates from the SPSO helped reassure me that action was being taken.' These were just some of the positive comments made by respondents, yet it was notable that these positive comments were not just from respondents whose complaints were fully upheld, but were from respondents with 'some upheld' and 'not upheld' outcomes too. We felt these positive comments reinforced the procedure for updating complaints we currently have in place.

### 2.7 Accessibility and support

One respondent, who identified themselves as a 'senior citizen' who did not have access to the internet, said that they 'felt it was a long journey to get to SPSO' and noted that they 'were not aware of SPSO prior to this matter.' The respondent suggested that we market our services by advertising in local papers and public places. We considered that the length of the journey that the respondent referred to was in relation to the authority's handling of their complaint. Since all authorities within jurisdiction are required to signpost to SPSO in their final response, we were satisfied that it was likely that the respondent was given contact details for SPSO at the appropriate time, especially given that the respondent had successfully complained to SPSO. We acknowledged that if members of the public have prior knowledge of SPSO and its function, then this may encourage them to make complaints about public services with the assurance that their complaint could be considered by an independent office if they were not satisfied. However, we noted that seeking to increase awareness of SPSO through advertising would likely come with some expense, and was therefore not something that we thought was merited at this time.

Another respondent stated that they were offered no support during the investigation process. The respondent said that the process was 'difficult, isolating and an emotional roller coaster of a journey' adding that 'it would be less challenging and help [to] address the perceived power imbalance if part of the process was the offer of independent support/advice.' While it is part of the SPSO's role to ensure that complainants have access to SPSO to make a complaint, SPSO is an independent and impartial organisation and one which does not have a provision to provide this kind of support to complainants. We acknowledged that it was unfortunate that the respondent felt unsupported, especially since there are a range of organisations – including local advocacy services, PASS and Citizens

Advice – that could assist in this regard. This matter was discussed in February 2017. A project on accessibility is being taken forward and will consider this matter.

## 2.8 Request for information about whether recommendations have been implemented

One respondent, who was presumably an advice worker or advocate, said 'It would be good for my clients to know that the recommendations that do not directly impact on them have been adhered to within the timelines i.e. recommendations to changes in an organisation's practice.' We appreciated that it would be valuable for those who have suffered an injustice to receive an explicit assurance that service improvements have been implemented within the timescales set by SPSO. However, we noted that there would be service implications if complaints reviewers were required to take this extra step in all relevant cases. We have previously made a recommendation that complaints reviewers are reminded that where a reasonable request is made for information to be provided on the progress of a recommendation, we should either provide this or ask the organisation being complained about to do so. This may be an issue that SPSO's Learning and Improvement Unit wish to consider.

## 2.9 Change of Complaints Reviewer

In one comment, a respondent expressed concern that 'the reviewer changed for no apparent reason. Just when I thought I was making some progress the reviewer left SPSO, again with no explanation.' We have previously made a recommendation that managers try to ensure that cases are not transferred between complaints reviewers on the same team unless this is absolutely necessary and that, when a case is transferred, there should be a clear explanation about the reasons for this. That said, in relation to the respondent's comment that one of the complaints reviewers involved in the case left SPSO without explanation, we did not consider that it would be appropriate for us to explain the reasons for a complaints reviewer's departure in all cases, as this might be personal information.

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