

**Customer Survey Quarter 3 (October - December 2016)
Analysis May 2017**

Recommendation: That staff are reminded that they should let complainants know when they will be out of the office on extended leave if they are asking complainants to contact them.

1 Purpose

To provide the SIG with details of the findings of the SPSO's Survey Analysis Group's review of the customer survey results for Quarter 3 (October - December 2016). Nicola Hendry has helped me to analyse the results for Quarter 3.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Response Rate

Fig. 1	Year 15/16			Q3 16/17			
Outcome	Surveys Returned	Surveys Issued	% of total returned	Surveys Returned	Surveys Issued	% of total returned	Diff.
not upheld	68	324	34%	14	81	41.2%	+7.2
some upheld	57	199	28.5%	5	45	14.7%	-13.8
fully upheld	75	239	37.5%	15	44	44.1%	+6.6
Overall	200	762	100%	34	170	100.0%	

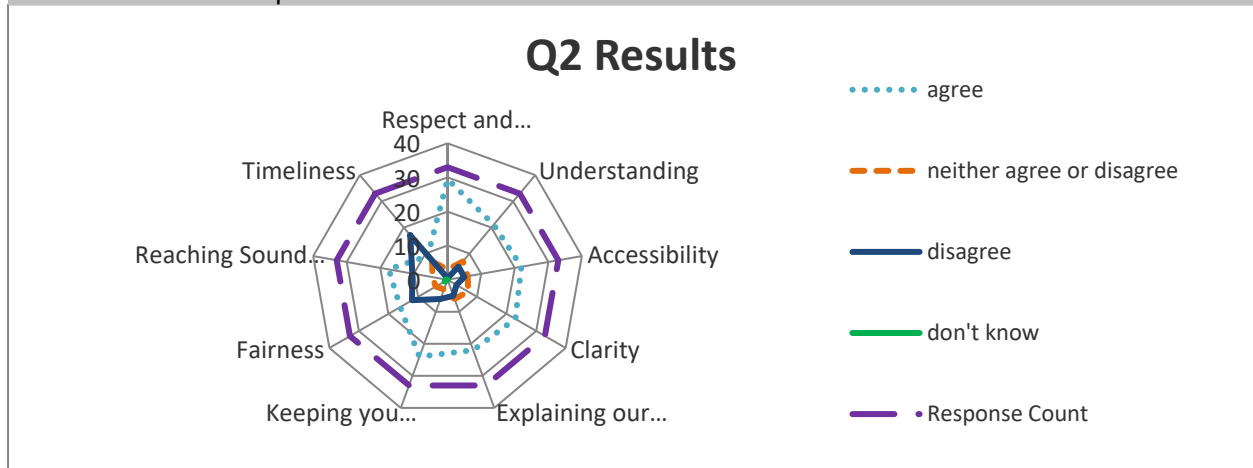
34 out of 170 forms issued for cases closed in Quarter 3 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 20%. This compares to a rate of 25.6% in Quarter 2 and 26.2% in the year 2015-2016. As can be seen in the above table, there was a slight increase in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints fully upheld and who had their complaints not upheld compared to the year 2015-2016. There was a decrease in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had some of their complaints upheld. We will consider this further below.

2.2 Satisfaction against service standards

In line with previous Quarters, satisfaction rates against service standards were generally high. The exceptions were again timeliness, fairness and reaching sound outcomes. There are two questions in the customer survey that relate to reaching sound outcomes. As with Quarter 2, the main dissatisfaction was in relation to a question about the outcome of the complaint rather than a question about whether they were given a clear explanation for our decision. In relation to respect and dignity, no one disagreed with the statement that SPSO staff treated them respectfully and only one person disagreed with the statement that SPSO staff treated them with courtesy.

Fig. 2

		agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	don't know	Response Count
Respect and Dignity		29.5	3	0.5	0	33
Understanding		21	7	5	0	33
Accessibility	I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service	22	6	5	0	33
Clarity		23	7	3	0	33
Explaining our Scope	SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me	22	6	5	0	33
Keeping you informed	I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed	24	3	6	0	33
Fairness	I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly	16	4	12	1	33
Reaching Sound Outcomes		17.5	4.5	10.5	0.5	33
Timeliness	The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable	9	7	17	0	33



2.3 Customer survey results comparison

Figure 3 compares the satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in Quarter 3 2016/2017, with the satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in the year 2015/2016.

Fig. 3

SPSO statement	SPSO Q3 16/17 % agree	SPSO Annual 15/16 % agree	Difference
Staff treated me with courtesy	84.8	86.4	-1.6
Staff listened to me and understood my complaint	60.6	73	-12.4
I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service	66.7	74.1	-7.4
SPSO checked what I wanted to happen	66.7	77.7	-11
It was clearly explained to me how my complaint would be handled	69.7	79.1	-9.4
SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me	66.7	72.7	-6
I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed	72.7	77.6	-4.9
SPSO communication with me was clear	69.7	82.6	-12.9
SPSO staff treated me respectfully	93.9	85.1	+8.8
I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly	48.5	61.5	-13
I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)	66.7	71.3	-4.6
The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable	27.3	46.4	-19.1

Figure 3 shows that there has been a decrease in agreement with all but one statement between the year 2015/2016 and Quarter 3 2016/2017. The level of decrease was 1.6 points in the lowest case and 19.1 points in the largest case. The decrease in the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements was over 10 points in five of the eleven statements that showed a decrease. This is disappointing and we will continue to monitor this. One reason for this may be that the proportion of responses received in relation to complaints that were not upheld has increased from 34% in the year 2015/2016 to 41% in Quarter 3 2016/2017.

The satisfaction rates for the statements from respondents who had their complaints fully upheld were again very high. All were over 80% except for two statements. In relation to timescales, only 33.3% agreed their complaint was dealt with in a reasonable timescale. 73.3% said they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. However, this is accounted for in part by those who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied as only two people stated they disagreed with the statement.

The satisfaction rates for respondents who had some of their complaints upheld were reasonably high. At most, only one respondent disagreed with any of the statements on the survey form, except for the one about timescales. However, a higher percentage of these respondents (60%) felt their complaint was dealt with in a reasonable timescale, compared to those whose complaints were fully upheld.

For complaints that were not upheld, the satisfaction rates were relatively low. In particular, 7.7% of respondents felt their complaint was dealt with fairly. Similarly, only 7.7% felt that the time taken to deal with their complaint was reasonable. Only 23.1% felt they were given a clear explanation for the SPSO's decision. The exception was the statement concerning SPSO staff treating them respectfully with 92.3% agreeing and no respondents disagreeing. Similarly, no respondents disagreed that SPSO staff treated them with courtesy.

2.4 Timeliness

Only 27.3% of respondents agreed with the statement that the time it took to deal with their complaint was reasonable. This compares to 46.4% in 2015/2016 and 34.2% in Quarter 2. 51.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement this quarter. The average days open figure¹ (the number of working days SPSO required to deal with a case) for cases closed after investigation for Quarter 3 was 172. The equivalent figure² for cases closed in Quarter 2 16/17 was 170. The increase of 2 days in the average time taken to investigate a case is unlikely to account for the further drop in relation to satisfaction levels in relation to this matter.

There were again a number of negative comments about the time taken to deal with complaints this quarter:

- 'I think it is a fantastic service easy to access and work with. The only problem I find is the length of time to resolve the complaints. This has only happened in the last 18 months and I hope this will improve.'
- 'The time taken to complete the complaint was longer than I would have expected. However, on saying this, it was noted that the SPSO have taken on additional case workers so hopefully the timescales should improve.'
- '...it took a long time before my case was allocated to someone.'
- 'I feel that it did take longer than expected.'
- 'Far too long and stressful a wait.'
- 'It took over a year to get a decision.'
- 'There was no clear estimate provided by the SPSO regarding the duration of the investigation, despite frequent requests for this.'

We have previously made a recommendation that introduction letters are reviewed with a view to reinforcing the information in the leaflet, 'Your Complaint at the SPSO' and providing additional information about possible timescales and our approach to reaching decisions. We have not identified any further recommendations that we consider should be made in relation to this.

2.5 Bias

A number of respondents made negative comments about unfairness or bias in the way their complaint was investigated. There were comments from respondents saying that we

¹ Average figure calculated from 168 cases closed in this period, which compares to 170 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 1.2%

² Average figure calculated from 159 cases closed in this period, which compares to 160 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 0.6%

believed the organisation being complained about, but asked complainants to prove what they said happened. Some respondents said that only the version of events from the organisation being complained about was considered and that their concerns were not properly addressed. However, all of these comments came from respondents whose complaints were not upheld. There were no comments about bias from complainants who had all or some of their complaints upheld. It is difficult to comment further on this, as we are unable to identify specific cases. However, this links to comments we made in previous reports that complainants are likely to be disappointed if their complaints are not upheld.

2.6 Accessibility and support

One respondent said they were 'given no support' during the investigation. It is concerning they found the support inadequate. However, we are not aware of the specific case and there is no further detail in the comment about what support was lacking. As a result, it is difficult to comment on this further. Conversely, there was a positive comment from a respondent about accessibility who said 'I think it is a fantastic service easy to access and work with'.

2.7 Outcome

One respondent said they were unsure what their complaint could achieve before being asked to confirm the outcome they were looking for. They commented 'I didn't know what my options were in terms of what the outcomes could be. I felt as though I was potentially left to suggest something as an outcome of the complaint and for staff to say yes or no'. They went on to say that they hoped they had not missed out on a possible outcome because they were unaware of it. Complainants who complete our complaint form or who complain online are asked to specify what outcome they are hoping to achieve. However, people who complain to us by letter may not have considered this. We would suggest that when complainants have not listed the outcome(s) they are looking for in their correspondence to us and are unsure about what we can achieve, the complaints reviewer gives them further information about the actions we could take before asking the complainant to agree the outcome they are seeking from their complaint.

2.8 Number of staff involved

One respondent stated that the case had changed hands so many times that they lost faith in the SPSO. They also said that three different people had dealt with their case. In addition, they commented that they received a letter from a member of staff asking them to phone them if they had any additional information, but when they contacted them, they were told that they were on holiday for three weeks. We make a recommendation in relation to this point below. We have previously recommended that cases are not transferred between CRs 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.

2.9 Complaints Agreement

We received three negative comments about the scope of the investigation. One respondent, whose complaint was fully upheld, said, 'my complaint was about a number of

faults...but only one...was looked at'. The other two comments appear to be from the same respondent, who said 'my specific complaints were not answered' and 'all my significant points were unanswered'. They went on to say they felt the complaints reviewer failed to grasp what their complaint was about. Conversely, we received a positive comment from a respondent whose complaint was fully upheld who said that they were 'impressed by the clear and unequivocal commitment by SPSO to clarify all the issues'. We felt it was difficult to make a recommendation without knowing the specifics of the complaints. It is unclear why these comments were made, as complainants are asked to agree the heads of complaint at the outset of the investigation.

2.10 Updates

72.7% of respondents (24) agreed with the statement that they were told clearly how their complaint was being progressed. 18.2% of respondents (6) disagreed with the statement. This included 3 respondents who had their complaints fully upheld. One respondent stated that they had to repeatedly ask for further information about how the case was progressing and had to send reminders to get an answer. However, another respondent said that the progress updates were excellent and another said that they received an excellent service and that the CR was informative at every stage of the process. These comments again show the importance of ensuring that proactive and informative updates are issued to complainants.

2.11 Jurisdiction

One respondent said that they were an advocacy worker and that their client was extremely frustrated that the SPSO was only able to investigate the handling of the complaint rather than the substantive issues. They stated that their client was not much consoled by being told that this will change next year. They stated that they could not say that their client was happy with how the SPSO addressed their complaint, but on the other hand, this was explained very clearly by the member of staff investigating the complaint. It appears that this relates to a social work complaint. Our role in relation to complaints about social work issues is outwith our control. However, it is positive to note that the respondent considered that this had been explained very clearly.

2.12 Notify professional organisations

One respondent said that they considered that we should inform the respective professional organisation about any complaint, irrespective of what the outcome is. Sections 19/20 of the SPSO Act 2002 set out the specific circumstances in which we can disclose confidential information about a complaint. The Act has recently been amended to allow us to share information with the Scottish Social Services Council and the Care Inspectorate. We are currently considering whether we should request a legislative change to extend this to other regulatory bodies. This would require a change to the SPSO Act. Whilst we could send our anonymised summaries to professional bodies, we do not consider it would be proportionate to do this in every case. In cases in the Investigations Team, where we have identified significant failings by an individual, we have previously had discussions with the

Ombudsman about whether the relevant professional body (e.g. General Medical Council or General Dental Council) should be notified in line with the Act.

2.13 Contradiction

One respondent commented that the person who originally dealt with their complaint appeared to contradict the person who actually investigated the complaint and there appeared to be a difference of opinion within the SPSO. They also said that they felt that, 'the independent investigator made an error'. It is difficult to comment further on this matter without any further information.

2.14 Positive comments

We received a range of positive comments from respondents, some of which expressed satisfaction that we had obtained independent professional advice on their complaint and others that praised how individual staff members had treated them. Many of the positive comments were from respondents whose complaints were upheld. One such respondent said '[the complaints reviewer] was patient, compassionate, understanding and informative at every stage of the process' and another said, 'all staff at the SPSO treated me fairly with sensitivity and respect. Could not have asked for better treatment with regards to my complaint'. A respondent whose complaint was not upheld commented: 'I was very impressed about the level of detail in the investigation...I also felt that the progress updates were excellent, although it took a long time before my complaint was allocated to someone, I was reassured that my case had not been forgotten. Although my complaint was not upheld, which I feel is unfair, the customer service I received was incredibly high. Thank you'. Another respondent, who had some complaints upheld, felt the remit of the investigation was limited but said this was 'explained very clearly by the SPSO staff member investigating [the aggrieved's] complaint'. These comments are encouraging and are reflective of the high level of agreement by respondents that SPSO staff had treated them with respect and with courtesy.

Recommendation

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1	Staff are reminded that they should let complainants know when they will be out of the office on extended leave if they are asking complainants to contact them
