

**Customer Survey Quarter 4 (January – March 2017)
Analysis September 2017**

Executive Summary: Several of the satisfaction rates against service standards were again high. However, there has been a decrease in agreement with all statements between the year 2015/2016 and Quarter 4 2016/2017. One reason for the decrease 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 4 2016/2017. The dissatisfaction with timeliness was particularly disappointing, with 24 out of 45 respondents disagreeing that the time it took to deal with their complaint was reasonable.

We received a number of negative comments in relation to the complaints statements agreed, interviews, bias and tone/courtesy. There were also a number of extremely positive comments and we have listed a selection of these below.

Recommendation:

When agreeing a statement of complaint, complaints reviewers should:

- ensure that the agreed statement includes all the points from the original complaint OR where it doesn't there is evidence of a discussion with the complainant about why
- have a discussion with complainants about any further information/evidence we need from them and why.

1 Purpose

To provide details of the findings of the SPSO's customer survey results for Quarter 4 (January-March 2017).

2 Key Findings

2.1 Response Rate

Fig. 1	Year 15/16			Q4 16/17			
Outcome	Surveys Returned	Surveys Issued	% of total returned	Surveys Returned	Surveys Issued	% of total returned	Diff.
not upheld	68	324	34%	19	91	41.3%	+7.3
some upheld	57	199	28.5%	17	61	37%	+8.5
fully upheld	75	239	37.5%	10	63	21.7%	-15.8
Overall	200	762	100%	46	215	100.0%	

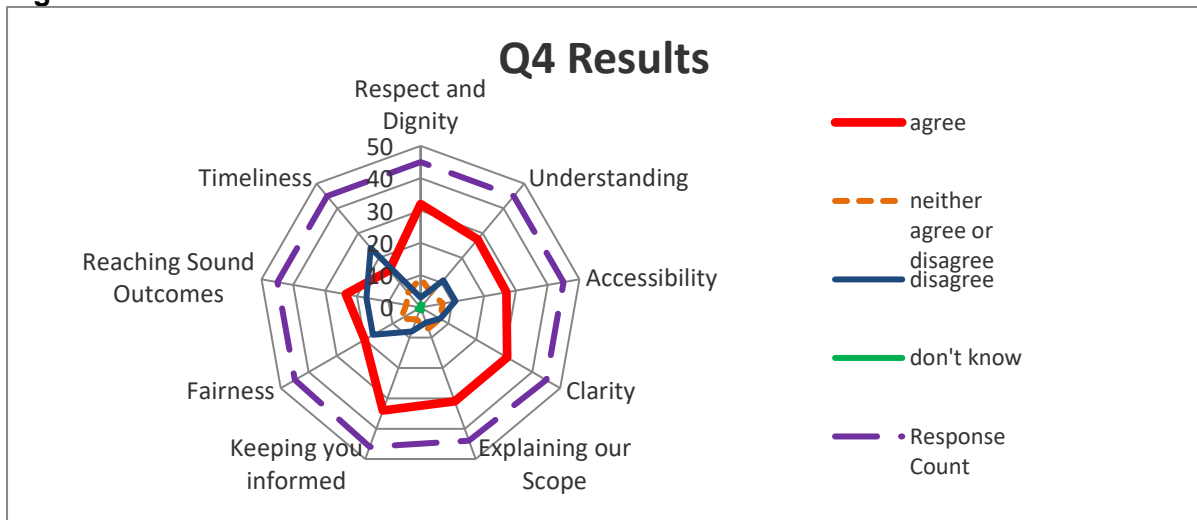
46 out of 215 forms issued for cases closed in Quarter 4 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 21.4%. The margin of error rate is 13% (using a confidence level of 95%). This compares to a response rate of 20% in Quarter 3 and 26.2% in the year 2015-2016. As can be seen in the above table, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints fully upheld compared to the year 2015-2016. Over 78% of the surveys returned were from complainants who either had some or none of their complaints upheld. We will consider this further below.

Whilst only 15.9% of the surveys issued to complainants who had their complaint fully upheld were returned this Quarter, this figure was 20.9% for not upheld complaints and 27.9% where some of the complaints were upheld.

2.2 Satisfaction against service standards

Several of the satisfaction rates against service standards were again high, particularly in relation to respect and dignity, keeping complainants informed, clarity and explaining our scope. In line with previous Quarters, the main areas of dissatisfaction were in relation to timeliness, fairness and reaching sound outcomes. The dissatisfaction with timeliness was particularly disappointing with 24 out of 45 respondents disagreeing that the time it took to deal with their complaint was reasonable. We will consider this further below.

Fig. 2



	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	don't know	Response Count
Respect and Dignity	32	9	3	1	45.0
Understanding	27.5	5.5	11	1	45.0
Accessibility	27	7	11	0	45
Clarity	31	7	7	0	45
Explaining our Scope	31	7	5	1	44
Keeping you informed	34	4	8	0	46
Fairness	20	7	17	1	45
Reaching Sound Outcomes	23.5	4.5	17	0	45
Timeliness	15	6	24	0	45

2.3 Customer survey results comparison

Figure 3 compares the satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in Quarter 4 2016/2017, with the satisfaction of SPSO customers surveyed in the year 2015/2016.

Fig. 3

SPSO statement	SPSO Q4 16/17 % agree	SPSO Annual 15/16 % agree	Difference
Staff treated me with courtesy	73.3	86.4	-13.1
Staff listened to me and understood my complaint	53.3	73	-19.7
I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service	60	74.1	-14.1
SPSO checked what I wanted to happen	68.9	77.7	-8.8
It was clearly explained to me how my complaint would be handled	66.7	79.1	-12.4
SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me	70.5	72.7	-2.2
I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed	73.9	77.6	-3.7
SPSO communication with me was clear	71.1	82.6	-11.5
SPSO staff treated me respectfully	68.9	85.1	-16.2
I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly	44.4	61.5	-17.1
I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)	64.4	71.3	-6.9
The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable	33.3	46.4	-13.1

There has been a decrease in agreement with all statements between the year 2015/2016 and Quarter 4 2016/2017. The level of decrease was 2.2 points in the lowest case and 19.7 points in the largest case. The decrease in the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements was over 10 points in eight of the twelve statements. This is disappointing and is something we are monitoring. One reason for the decrease 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 4 2016/2017. Also, the percentage of respondents who were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint was only 40%. In 2015/2016, this figure was 47%. This may have influenced the perception of the service we provided to respondents.

Fully upheld: The satisfaction rates for the statements from respondents who had their complaints fully upheld were very high. The satisfaction rates in relation to ten out of twelve statements were 90% or over. 100% of respondents agreed that we checked what they wanted to happen. 80% agreed they were clearly told what could be achieved from their complaint. In relation to timescales, the majority of respondents, 60%, were satisfied with the time taken to deal with their complaint.

Some upheld: The satisfaction rates for respondents who had some of their complaints upheld were reasonably high. Nine out of twelve of the statements had satisfaction rates of 75% or over. Although only 43.8% of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their

complaint, 87.5% of respondents said they were clearly told what outcomes may or may not be achieved for them. However, in relation to timescales, only 35.3% were satisfied with the time taken to deal with their complaint. Only 50% agreed their complaint was dealt with fairly and only 56% felt staff listened to them and understood their complaint. That said, for both these statements, 19% of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Not upheld: For complaints that were not upheld, the satisfaction rates were relatively low. Only four out of twelve customer service statements had satisfaction rates that were 50% or over. In particular, only 15.8% felt their complaint was dealt with fairly and only 16.7% felt the time taken to deal with their complaint was reasonable. However, all of the response rates can be accounted for in part by the relatively high number of people who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements. Whilst only 55.6% of respondents agreed that staff treated them with courtesy and only 44.4% of respondents agreed that they were treated respectfully, only two respondents disagreed with each of these statements.

2.4 Timeliness

33.3% of respondents this Quarter agreed with the statement that the time taken to deal with their complaint was reasonable. This compares to 46.4% in 2015/2016 and 27.3% in Quarter 3. 53.3% of respondents disagreed with the statement this Quarter (compared to 51.5% in Quarter 3). The average days open figure (the number of days SPSO required to deal with an investigation case) for cases closed for Quarter 4 was 172 days, which was the same number of days as Quarter 3.

In cases that were fully upheld, 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that the time taken to deal with their complaint was reasonable. For complaints that were not upheld, only 16.7% of respondents agreed with the statement.

We again received a number of negative comments about the time taken to investigate complaints this Quarter:

- 'Everything was dealt with well but it did take a long time.'
- 'The process did take a very long time simply because of the sheer level of complaints they currently receive...'
- 'Time taken too long to come to conclusion.'
- 'Process could be faster.'

There were also a number of negative comments about the time taken that specifically referred to delay in allocating cases due to the holding bay:

- 'Unacceptable length of time taken from time my complaint was received until a 'complaint reviewer' was assigned. Gives the impression that the SPSO is understaffed.'
- 'My only issue is that it took so many weeks to be allocated a complaints officer due to heavy demand, once we had a representative the service was good.'

In relation to the previous comment, it is worth noting that whilst some respondents were critical of the time taken to allocate or investigate their complaints, they made positive comments about other aspects of the service they received from us:

- 'The individual I dealt with was very good, however, the process took longer than a year, which is very disappointing.'

These comments provide support to the decision that clearing the holding bay should be a business priority over the next few months.

One of the respondents also referred to the fact that their Complaints Reviewer was part-time:

- Knowledge that assigned 'complaint reviewer' only works three days a week and is frequently on 'annual leave', gives the complainant the impression that their complaint not being treated with the expected seriousness and priority.'

2.5 Complaints Agreement

We received negative comments that were related to the complaint agreement process. One respondent said, 'you could ensure that you actually address the complaint that was made and not make out items that were not complained about as if they were'. A respondent whose complaint was partly upheld said 'they didn't address all the issues that I had raised'. It is unclear why these comments were made, as complainants are asked to agree the heads of complaint at the outset of the investigation. We received two positive comments from respondents who had their complaints partly or fully upheld, both describing the investigation as 'thorough'.

2.6 Interview

We received two negative comments about the failure to carry out interviews. One respondent said they offered to come to our offices for an interview but was informed 'we don't normally do that'. Another said their family members should have been interviewed. Whilst we should consider requests for interview, it is a matter for the complaints reviewer's discretion to decide whether an interview is necessary and we do not consider it would be proportionate to carry out an interview in every case where this is requested.

2.7 Bias

We received several negative comments about bias or unfairness in how their complaint was handled. Most comments related to the way the respondent's evidence was assessed against the evidence submitted by the organisation being complained about. One respondent said:

- 'I appreciate the difficulty for SPSO in agreeing one view or another, but we stated the version of events as they happened, and had nothing to gain in lying - this was clearly not the case for the staff involved'.

Another said we give 'little or no weight to the statements of victims and treat the victims as unreliable'.

A further comment was that:

- 'It is completely wrong to assume everything [the organisation being complained about] has written down is correct, they are capable of making false assumptions and mistakes which influence how they report things'.

We would suggest that when complaints are not upheld because the complainant's account is disputed and/or the incident was not recorded by the organisation being complained about, the complaints reviewer should consider reassuring the complainant that their credibility is not being questioned and/or reflect that it is possible to keep adequate records, but provide poor care or service, that cannot be revealed by subsequent examination of these records. We may also wish to consider organising some staff training in relation to the issue of bias.

2.8 Tone/Courtesy

Although, overall, 73.3% of respondents agreed that staff treated them with courtesy and 69.9% of respondents agreed that staff treated them respectfully, we received three negative comments about staff members not being courteous or respectful. One respondent said the complaints reviewer was 'rude when challenged' and another referred to staff having 'arrogant attitudes'. A further comment said 'I felt staff spoke to me in an inappropriate manner at times i.e. tone of voice'. In contrast, we received several positive comments about the way staff dealt with respondents. One respondent said that they were treated with 'courtesy' and 'concern' by staff, whilst another said the complaints reviewer was 'professional'.

Team managers now consider respect and dignity when carrying out telephone QAs. Having considered the QA form in relation to this, we have not made any recommendations in relation to this matter.

2.9 Positive Comments

We again received a number of positive comments this Quarter from respondents. We have included a selection of these below:

- 'Fantastic Service.'
- 'I was very impressed and grateful for the way my complaint was treated – with courtesy, concern and thoroughness. Thank you for being there to listen and understand when faced by neglect, rudeness and apathy. God bless you all and more power to your elbow!!'
- 'The service provide[d] was excellent. I cannot think of any area where there is room for improvement.'
- 'The SPSO officer who dealt with my case showed a remarkably clear understanding of the circumstances. He was able to accurately assess the relative merits of the information presented.'

There were a number of positive comments from respondents who did not have all of their complaints upheld:

- ‘The staff were absolutely terrific throughout the process. I would even go so far as to say that they went beyond their remit to support me and my family, from start to finish.’
- The Enquiry Officer was thorough and professional and her report was concise and clear.’
- I would like to praise the time and effort that goes into addressing all the complaints even when they are not successful. Well done. Professional job.’

2.10 Questionnaire

One respondent commented that the questionnaire said that it was to be returned by a date that had already passed. They stated that this just about summed up the incompetence of the SPSO and that they had enclosed the date stamp from the envelope. We looked into this and could not see any evidence that an incorrect date had been given to the respondent. The records have since been destroyed and there is no way that we can consider this further.

2.11 Limited number of characters

Another respondent stated that when they were submitting their complaint, they were limited to a certain number of characters to explain and submit the complaint, whilst the organisation they complained about had months in which to compile and return their evidence. They stated that they were not contacted at any point for further information beyond the initial complaint.

We discussed this matter with the Manager of the Advice Team. She confirmed that there is a limit on the number of characters that can be used when submitting a complaint online. This is in order to try to focus the complainant on the complaint and what they would like to achieve. However, the complainant can attach other relevant information when submitting the complaint. They are also given the option of posting this to us. However, having considered the respondent’s comment that they were not contacted at any point for further information, we have made a recommendation in relation to this matter below.

3 Recommendations

3.1 New Recommendations

	Recommendation (Operational)
1	When agreeing a statement of complaint, complaints reviewers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- ensure that the agreed statement includes all the points from the original complaint OR where it doesn’t there is evidence of a discussion with the complainant about why- have a discussion with complainants about any further information/evidence we need from them and why.

3.2 Previous Recommendations

	Recommendation
1	Where a complainant asks us to take a particular action to investigate their complaint, or suggests we make a particular recommendation, and we do not consider that these are appropriate, we should consider explaining to the complainant why we will not take this action.
2	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.
