

## Customer Survey Quarter 1 2017/18 (April – June 2017)

From: **Gary Elliott**  
When: **February 2018**

### Executive Summary:

This is the first customer survey report based on the revamped customer survey form. The statements in the new customer survey form were taken from the Ombudsman Association Service Standards Framework. In the report, we consider the satisfaction rates based on the new questions and, where there was an equivalent question, we have compared the results of the survey with the results of the 2016/17 survey. Apart from one question, there has either been an increase in the satisfaction rate this quarter or a negligible decrease.

That said, we received a number of negative responses in relation to updates, delays in obtaining information from BUJs, media interest and recommendations. We consider these points in the report. We have also again received a number of positive comments, some of which we have listed.

### Recommendations:

Point / Service Standard	What we found	What we should do	Evidence needed to check that this has happened and the deadline
2.10 Timeliness	Some of the comments received suggest that some complainants have the impression that staff are not chasing BUJs for information when they fail to meet deadlines.	Staff should be reminded that where there are delays by BUJs in providing information that has been requested, they should consider informing managers with a view to escalation. LIU should also monitor this. We should also consider referring to this matter in the Ombudsman's monthly overview.	Confirmation from managers that relevant staff have been informed of this.
2.12 Keeping you informed	A respondent who had received a public report said that they hadn't quite realised how quickly there would be media interest and the extent of the coverage.	Complainants should be given more detailed information about the likelihood of press interest when a public report is issued (even if the complainant has not agreed to press contact).	Confirmation from Comms that this matter has been considered.

## 1. Purpose

1.1 To provide the Service Improvement Group (SIG) with details of the findings of the SPSO's Survey Analysis Group's review of the customer survey results for Quarter 1 (April- June 2017). A member of the Investigations Team has again helped me to analyse the results for this Quarter.

## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1 New Customer survey form

In May 2017 the Ombudsman Association launched their Service Standards Framework. SPSO were heavily involved in drafting the Framework, which states that:

'Members should assess and report on their performance towards meeting the service standards set out in clause 3 above and publish this on a regular basis, at least annually.'

We decided to bring the customer survey into line with the Framework and it helps us to assess our performance against some (but not all of) the standards. We have also tried (where possible) to move away from asking questions that are related to the outcome of a case. This is the first customer survey report on the new version of the customer survey form.

### 2.2 Response Rate

<b>Fig. 1</b>	<b>Year 16/17</b>			<b>Q1 17/18</b>		
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Surveys Issued</b>	<b>Surveys Returned</b>	<b>% returned</b>	<b>Surveys Issued</b>	<b>Surveys Returned</b>	<b>% returned</b>
not upheld	328	69	21.0%	50	12	24.0%
some upheld	193	47	24.4%	59	16	27.1%
fully upheld	202	51	25.2%	50	16	32.0%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>27.7%</b>

44 out of 159 forms issued for cases closed in Quarter 1 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 27.7%. This is an increase on the response rate of 23.1% for the year 2016-2017. As can be seen in the above table, over 72% of the surveys returned were from complainants who either had some or all of their complaints upheld. The margin of error rate is 13% (using a confidence level of 95%).

### 2.3 Satisfaction against SPSO statements

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, in line with previous customer surveys, the statement that attracted the most negative response was in relation to the time taken to deal with complaints. 13 respondents disagreed with the statement that we dealt with their complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of their case. That said, 25 complainants agreed with the statement this Quarter and, as can be seen in Figure 3, the proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement has increased from 30% in the 2016/17 year to 58%. It should be noted, however, that the question in relation to this matter in previous surveys did not refer to the complexity of the case.

Only 18 respondents agreed with the statement, '[W]here I needed support from the SPSO to access its service, the SPSO arranged this or told me who could assist me'. This is clearly disappointing, but can partly be qualified by the fact that 10 respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the statement and 4 respondents said they didn't know. 8 respondents (20%) disagreed with the statement.

<b>Fig. 2</b>	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Response Count
<b>SPSO statement</b>					
I received a customer focussed service from the SPSO	23	8	11	1	43
Where I needed support from the SPSO to access its service, the SPSO arranged this or told me who could assist me	18	10	8	4	40
SPSO staff listened to me and understood my complaint	29	8	6	0	43
SPSO staff checked what I wanted to happen as a result of my complaint	29	5	9	0	43
SPSO staff treated me with courtesy, respect and dignity	37	5	2	0	44
SPSO staff contacted me using my preferred method of communication (if I specified one)	41	3	0	0	44
SPSO staff explained to me the role of the SPSO and what SPSO can and cannot do	40	3	1	0	44
SPSO staff explained to me how my complaint would be handled and the likely timescales for completion	35	3	6	0	44
I was regularly told how my complaint was being progressed	35	6	3	0	44
I was told at each stage of the process who I could contact if I had any questions	36	4	4	0	44
SPSO staff communicated with me using plain and clear language	37	5	2	0	44
SPSO's communication with me was accurate	30	8	5	1	44
SPSO dealt with my complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of my case	25	4	13	1	43
SPSO staff treated me without discrimination and prejudice	34	6	4	0	44
I received a clear explanation of the reasons for the SPSO's decision(s) on my complaint	29	7	8	0	44

## 2.4 Comparison with the 2016/17 customer survey results

In Figure 3 below, where there is an equivalent question, we have compared the results of this survey with the results of the 2016/17 survey. Positively, with the exception of the question about the SPSO arranging support or telling the person who could assist them (see 2.3 above), there was either an increase in the satisfaction rate or a negligible decrease.

**Fig. 3**

SPSO statement	SPSO Q1 17/18 % agree	Difference	SPSO 16/17 % agree	Equivalent question(s) in previous SPSO customer surveys
I received a customer focussed service from the SPSO	53.49	N/A	N/A	None
Where I needed support from the SPSO to access its service, the SPSO arranged this or told me who could assist me	45	-16	61	I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service
SPSO staff listened to me and understood my complaint	67.44	+8.44	59	Staff listened to me and understood my complaint
SPSO staff checked what I wanted to happen as a result of my complaint	67.44	-0.56	68	SPSO checked what I wanted to happen
SPSO staff treated me with courtesy, respect and dignity	84.09	+2.59	81.5	Staff treated me with courtesy SPSO staff treated me respectfully
SPSO staff contacted me using my preferred method of communication (if I specified one)	93.18	N/A	N/A	None
SPSO staff explained to me the role of the SPSO and what SPSO can and cannot do	90.91	+24.91	66	SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me
SPSO staff explained to me how my complaint would be handled and the likely timescales for completion	79.55	+7.55	72	It was clearly explained to me how my complaint would be handled
I was regularly told how my complaint was being progressed	79.55	+9.55	70	I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed
I was told at each stage of the process who I could contact if I had any questions	81.82	N/A	N/A	None
SPSO staff communicated with me using plain and clear language	84.09	+17.09	67	SPSO communication with me was clear I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)
SPSO's communication with me was accurate	68.18	N/A	N/A	None
SPSO dealt with my complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of my case	58.14	+28.14	30	The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable

SPSO staff treated me without discrimination and prejudice	77.27	N/A	N/A	None
I received a clear explanation of the reasons for the SPSO's decision(s) on my complaint	65.91	+1.91	64	I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)

## 2.5 Satisfaction rates by outcome

We consider the satisfaction rates in relation to whether the complaint was fully upheld, not upheld or had some complaints upheld below.

**Fully upheld:** The satisfaction rates for the statements from respondents who had their complaints fully upheld were generally high. Twelve out of fifteen statements had satisfaction rates of 75% or over. 100% of respondents agreed that staff contacted them using their preferred method of communication, that staff explained to them the role of SPSO, and that they were treated without discrimination and prejudice. A high number of respondents (93.33%) agreed that staff listened to them and understood their complaint. 66.67% of respondents 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 fifteen of the statements had satisfaction rates of 75% or over. 87.5% of respondents agreed that staff treated them with courtesy, dignity and respect, and explained the role of the SPSO. However, 37.5% of respondents felt that where they needed support from the SPSO to access its service, the SPSO arranged this or told them who could assist them. That said, 43.75% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. In relation to timescales, 62.5% of respondents felt that their case was dealt with in a timely manner.

**Not upheld:** The satisfaction rates for complaints that were not upheld were lower; only five out of fifteen of the statements had satisfaction rates of 75% or over. In particular, only 27.27% agreed that they received a customer focussed service from the SPSO. However, 83.33% of respondents agreed that they were contacted using their preferred method, and that staff explained the role of the SPSO to them. 42% of respondents agreed that their complaint was dealt with in a timely manner.

## 2.6 Updates

79.54% of respondents (35) agreed with the statement that they were regularly told how their complaint was being progressed. Only 6.82% of respondents (3) disagreed with the statement (13.64% neither agreed or disagreed), including one respondent who had their complaints fully upheld. One complainant commented that. '[M]y complaint was conducted in a very professional manner, updated monthly on how things were progressing.'

That said, there were a number of negative comments in relation to contact with the complaints reviewer during the investigation. One respondent said that the person dealing with their complaints was always off and that this delayed the response and another said that the officer handling their complaint was often on (redacted) leave. They said that they got fed up leaving messages on their voicemail and had to contact their manager. Another respondent said that it was very difficult to get hold of the person dealing with the case when you telephoned, whilst someone else said that they were not consulted about their complaint as much as they would like to have been. We have

previously recommended 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.

## 2.7 Two officers

81.82% of respondents (36) agreed that they were told at each stage of the process who they could contact if they had any questions. Only 9.09% of respondents (4) disagreed with the statement. However, one respondent (who had their case upheld) stated that their case had been considered by two different officers, but they were not given an explanation about why it was necessary for the second officer to take over. This is disappointing and we had previously recommended that when a case is transferred between officers, there should be a clear explanation about the reasons for this. That said, this provides support to the decision that we now identify the cases that should be referred to the Investigations Team at an early stage to prevent them having to be transferred. The number of cases being transferred between officers (and the resulting double-handling) has reduced significantly.

## 2.8 Decision on complaints

65.91% of respondents (29) agreed with the statement that they had received a clear explanation of the reasons for our decision on their complaint. 18.18% (8) of respondents disagreed with this statement. 6 of these respondents did not have any of their complaints upheld.

Although we have tried to steer respondents away from commenting on the decision on their complaints, we have received some comments that relate to the decision:

- 'The SPSO was not able to check and prove what was clearly proved in my complaints.'
- 'There seemed to be no proper testing of truth vs untruth by the specialist adviser.'
- 'The decision around the complaint was very biased on the (redacted) adviser's opinion.'

The responses are anonymous and it is not possible to comment further on these cases. However, the complainants in these cases would have been entitled to request a review of the decision. One respondent indicated they had done so. The review process, rather than the customer service report, is the appropriate avenue for complainants who have concerns about the decision reached on their complaint.

## 2.9 Timeliness

This Quarter, we changed the statement regarding timeliness, from, '[T]he time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable' to, 'SPSO dealt with my complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of my case.'

58.14% of all respondents this Quarter agreed with the statement that the SPSO dealt with their complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of their case. Whilst this is up from 33.3% in Q4, this improvement may in part be accounted for by the change in the statement. The average days open figure (the number of days SPSO required to deal with an investigation case) for cases closed for this quarter was 173 days, which is one day more than the number of days for the previous Quarters, Q4 and Q3 of 2016/17.

In cases that were fully upheld, 66.67% of respondents were satisfied with the time taken to deal with their complaint; up from 60% in Q4. In cases that were not upheld, 42% of respondents agreed that their complaint was dealt with in a timely manner; up from 16.7% in Q4.

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

- 'Time taken to deal with my complaints was a disgrace'
- 'The response to my complaint took way too long (over 6 months for a simple straightforward complaint) and the excuses given were poor ("we're too busy")'
- 'SPSO can improve the time management'
- 'Our client's case was fast-tracked, due to the [redacted], however, the case still took months to conclude.'

Some comments regarding timeliness related to the time taken for the BUJ to provide the relevant information. We will consider this further below at 2.10.

## 2.10 Information from BUJs

We received four separate comments regarding the time taken for BUJs to provide information that we had requested. One respondent noted that there are time limits for complainants to adhere to, and that BUJs should have the same conditions imposed on them. They said that it seemed the BUJ were allowed to send the information whenever they liked. One respondent said that they felt the SPSO should have been more forceful with the BUJ to meet deadlines. Another respondent commented:

- 'It took over a year to have a decision regarding my complaint I do understand that my case was very complex and that it did take long time for SPSO to get documents from the public sector... The SPSO should have greater power to get reinvent [relevant] documents and information from the public sector'

Some of these comments suggest that some complainants have the impression that staff are not chasing BUJs for information when they fail to meet deadlines. We have made a recommendation in relation to this matter below.

## 2.11 Preferred method of contact

It is worth noting that out of the fifteen statements asked, the most widely agreed with was 'SPSO staff contacted me using my preferred method of communication (if I specified one)'. 93.18% of respondents agreed with this statement, 6.82% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 0% disagreed.

## 2.12 Media interest

We received one comment regarding media interest:

- 'I was told there may be media interest in the report as it was a public report. I hadn't quite realised how quickly this would happen and the extent of cover there would be... I was a bit taken aback and felt I could have been warned a little more about this.'

Whilst this was a single comment, we have made a recommendation in relation to this below.

## 2.13 Review requests

We received several comments regarding reviews of decisions. One respondent commented:

- 'person I complained about asked for a review. Not hear anything for over 1 month & it's stressful waiting.'

We should ensure that we keep complainants updated when the BUJ involved in their complaint has requested a review. Another comment was that whilst we did not complete the review within our timescales, we did keep them updated on the delay and apologised for this. This shows that it is beneficial to update complainants throughout the review request process.

## 2.14 Submitting complaint

One respondent stated that when they were submitting their complaint, they were told not to include all of their paperwork with their complaint form. We consider that this was reasonable, as we do not need all of the evidence from a complainant when they first submit a complaint. We have also previously recommended that when agreeing a complaint, complaints reviewers (CRs) should have a discussion with complainants about any further information/evidence we need from them and why.

## 2.15 Recommendations

One respondent stated that although they were totally satisfied, we said that we would contact them to see if they had received the apology. They told us that they had received the apology, but we had not contacted them to confirm they had received this. We consider that it was likely that this was a misunderstanding. We receive a copy of the apology from the body complained about and do not normally contact the complainant to confirm that they have received this.

Another said that there were several recommendations and they wondered if there was a way to let complainants know once the recommendations had been completed satisfactorily. They said that they had no way of knowing whether the suggested changes had been made and just had to trust that the system would work. We consider that it would be good customer service to contact complainants to confirm that the recommendations have been implemented. However, there would be resource implications in relation to this. We have discussed this with a member of LIU and they have informed us that there have previously been discussions with SMT in relation to this matter.

## 2.16 Positive Comments

There were again a number of positive comments this Quarter from respondents and we have included a selection of these below:

- 'I was really impressed with the regular communication which was always considerate and empathetic. My complaint was carefully considered and the resulting report was very thorough.'
- 'Highly impressed with the professional efficient manner my complaint was dealt with...'
- 'I was very impressed with the lady who handled my case. I had the clear impression that she listened and understood what I was talking about...'
- 'I found the SPSO and its staff very helpful in a difficult complaint.'
- 'Thank goodness this service exists and helped me.'
- 'No complaints at all – an excellent service.'

There were again positive comments from respondents who did not have any of their complaints upheld:

- 'I wish to thank the SPSO for taking the time to consider my complaint and for agreeing to investigate it. I would also like to thank each individual for their time and the work they put in. It meant such a lot to me and my family and made such a huge difference to the way I was subsequently treated by the service I had complained about.'
- 'I have complained on people's behalf a few times to the SPSO and have found them to be courteous, accurate and efficient in their communications with my organisation. I would recommend using the service to get a fair and thorough outcome to their complaint.'

### 3. Recommendations

#### 3.1 New Recommendations

Point / Service Standard	What we found	What we should do	Evidence needed to check that this has happened and the deadline
2.10 Timeliness	Some of the comments received suggest that some complainants have the impression that staff are not chasing BUJs for information when they fail to meet deadlines.	Staff should be reminded that where there are delays by BUJs in providing information that has been requested, they should consider informing managers with a view to escalation. LIU should also monitor this. We should also consider referring to this matter in the Ombudsman's monthly overview.	Confirmation from managers that relevant staff have been informed of this.
2.12 Keeping you informed	A respondent who had received a public report said that they hadn't quite realised how quickly there would be media interest and the extent of the coverage.	Complainants should be given more detailed information about the likelihood of press interest when a public report is issued (even if the complainant has not agreed to press contact).	Confirmation from Comms that this matter has been considered.

#### 3.2 Previous Recommendations

	Recommendation	Task owner	Date of action	Outcome of action
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.	Team managers (JS & KS)	31 July 2017/ 7 August 2017	Email reminders sent to staff
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.	Team managers (JS & KS)	31 July 2017/ 7 August 2017	Email reminders sent to staff
3	When agreeing a statement of complaint, CRs 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.	Team Managers	7/2/18	Email reminders sent to staff/discussed at team meeting

