

Mr Richard Ackroyd
Chief Executive
Scottish Water
Castle House
6 Castle Drive
Carnegie Campus
Dunfermline
KY11 8GG

24 July 2012

Dear Mr Ackroyd,

Annual letter 2011-12: complaints to SPSO about Scottish Water

This letter contains the SPSO's complaints statistics about Scottish Water for the 2011-12 financial year. It gives information about the numbers of complaints that we received and determined about Scottish Water. It also highlights the number of premature complaints (those that came to this office too early, before completing your complaints process) and those complaints that were 'fit for SPSO' (i.e. valid for investigation by SPSO) and their outcome.

Trends in complaints

Last year, I stated my disappointment at the 'unacceptably high' level of upheld and premature complaints about all sectors that were determined by SPSO. In 2011-12, the level of overall upheld complaints - those that were 'eligible for SPSO' and where I upheld or all or part of the complaint - went up from 34% to 39%. The overall level of premature complaints fell from 45% to 43%. In this letter, we draw attention to the figures of upheld and premature complaints for your organisation.

This is the first year that we have issued statistics on complaints about water services and so we cannot draw a comparison with last year. Premature complaints are higher than in other sectors and for Scottish Water, the figure is 54%. I asked our advice team who deal with first contacts to provide some feedback on this figure.

They consider that this figure is particularly striking as, given the way water complaints are handled, this figure should be lower than average. This is because:

- a streamlined short complaints process is already in existence

- in our experience around half of all of the premature callers to our office have already been in recent conversation with Scottish Water about their complaint and should be aware of the process for escalating any issues.

I appreciate that complaints about water are new to my jurisdiction and it is possible that there are other factors contributing to the relatively high rate of premature complaints. However, my staff who talk to water customers consider it may be possible to reduce these rates if Scottish Water improve the progression and signposting of complaints internally.

We will look closely at these figures again next year.

Statistics

Comprehensive statistical information about all the sectors under our remit is available at the following link: www.spsso.org.uk/statistics. In summary, in 2011-12, the SPSO:

- received **3,918** complaints (**12% more** than last year)
- received **318** complaints about water services
- resolved **3,748** complaints (**12% more** than last year)
- resolved **271** complaints about water services

The attached pages provide information about the complaints we handled about Scottish Water in 2011-12. The first table shows complaints received by primary subject area, both about your organisation and overall about water services. The second table shows the outcomes of the complaints we handled about Scottish Water. It also highlights the rate of premature and fully/partly upheld complaints and overall rates for water services.

The upheld/partly upheld outcomes relate to complaints that were 'fit for SPSO' (i.e. valid for investigation by SPSO) and which were determined at the Early Resolution (ER) 2 or Investigation (INV) 1 or 2 stages of our process. ER2 and INV 1 are investigations that conclude in a decision letter, and INV 2 concludes in a full investigation report. Since June 2011, we have published outcomes of complaints that were 'fit for SPSO' on our website. These are searchable (by sector, organisation, subject etc) and can be accessed at <http://www.spsso.org.uk/our-findings> .

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA)

A strong focus of our work over the past year has been on improving standards of complaints handling across all sectors, with an emphasis on early resolution by organisations. In the course of 2011, our Complaints Standards Authority developed model complaints handling procedures (CHPs) for councils and the registered social landlord (RSL) sector. This year we will move to completing model CHPs for all sectors. We have included water in the Scottish Government and related bodies sector and we will be developing a model CHP for this sector over the course of 2012/2013.

This CHP, like those for other sectors, will be based on the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles and Guidance on a Model Complaints Handling Procedure and will have at its heart a 2-stage procedure, and clear and transparent timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

The model CHP will act as a template for bodies to adopt and further information will be provided in due course on organisations' duty of compliance. However, in advance of the development and publication of the CHP for this sector we are encouraging all bodies under the SPSO's jurisdiction to move towards the complaints handling model outlined in the SPSO's guidance and the published model CHPs for local authorities and RSLs. Paul McFadden, our Head of Complaints Standards, would be happy to discuss this in further detail if required.

There is much more information about the model CHPs and a wealth of advice, support and guidance on the CSA's website at www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk.

Using complaints information

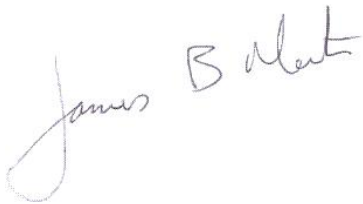
The statistics we give here should help your organisation reflect on and identify ways to improve your complaints handling, and it may be helpful to consider:

- what action you can take to promote early resolution of complaints
- what you can do to reduce the level of premature complaints
- whether the subject of complaints brought to SPSO meet your expectations
- any variance in complaints figures across your departments
- how to share the learning from our recommendations with staff across the organisation
- how our recommendations are monitored and actioned at senior level and how service changes and improvements are managed

- how you tell service users about action taken to improve services as a result of complaints resolved locally and through SPSO recommendations.

As ever, I value feedback about our work and would welcome any comments about this summary or any other aspect of our service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Balent". The signature is written in a light grey or blue ink.

Jim Martin
Ombudsman

Scottish Water Complaints Received or Reopened 2011-2012

Subject	Scottish Water	Water Total	SG&D Total	Complaints as % of SG&D total
Billing and Charging	9	89	89	10%
Customer Service	10	17	17	59%
Environmental Concerns	6	6	6	100%
New Connections	3	4	4	75%
Other	10	17	17	59%
Waste Water	43	45	45	96%
Water Supply	31	42	42	74%
Out Of Jurisdiction	0	0	30	0%
Subject Unknown	50	98	228	22%
Complaint Total	162	318	903	

Complaints as % of SG&D sector

(Scottish Government & Devolved Administration)

18%

Scottish Water Complaints Determined 2011-2012

Stage	Closure Category	Scottish Water	Water Total	SG&D Total
Advice	Premature	75	150	272
	Body out of jurisdiction	0	0	0
	Matter out of jurisdiction (discretionary)	0	0	9
	Matter out of jurisdiction (non-discretionary)	1	1	37
	Outcome not achievable	1	2	7
	No decision reached	27	59	171
	Total	104	212	496
Early Resolution 1	Premature	0	3	31
	Body out of jurisdiction	0	0	0
	Matter out of jurisdiction (discretionary)	1	1	16
	Matter out of jurisdiction (non-discretionary)	1	1	33
	Outcome not achievable	2	2	20
	No decision reached	10	11	62
	Total	14	18	162
Early Resolution 2	Outcome not achievable	1	1	1
	No decision reached	3	6	11
	Fully upheld	1	2	11
	Partly upheld	3	4	13
	Not upheld	6	11	109
	Total	14	24	145
Investigation 1	No decision reached	0	0	1
	fully upheld	2	6	6
	partly upheld	2	6	15
	not upheld	2	5	26
	Total	6	17	48
Investigation 2	No decision reached	0	0	0
	Fully upheld	0	0	0
	Partly upheld	0	0	1
	Not upheld	0	0	0
	Total	0	0	1
Total Complaints	138	271	852	

Premature total

75

153

303

Premature %

54%

56%

36%

Fit for SPSO Total (ER2, Inv 1 & 2)

20

41

194

Total uphold/partly upholds

8

18

46

% Upholds/Partly Upholds of Fit for SPSO

40%

44%

24%