

25 August 2016

Annual Letter from SPSO

Dear [Chief Executive],

I am pleased to send you our annual letter with statistics about complaints to SPSO about your organisation in 2015-16. As I highlighted in my June commentary, I am asking authorities to confirm that SPSO complaints are reviewed at a senior level (such as the appropriate scrutiny/ governance/ performance committees) by returning a learning and improvement statement to us. This builds on the model complaints handling procedures that set out the importance of authorities demonstrating how they 'systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery'.

I am also providing an update on our learning and improvement pilot. This is an exciting project, and I hope you will take up our invitation to be involved in it by providing feedback about how you share learning from complaints within your organisation, and giving us your views on SPSO recommendations.

2015-16 complaints statistics

As you will know, in line with the model complaints handling procedure, each authority is required to report and publicise complaints information on a quarterly and annual basis, including annual reporting on how they perform against the agreed performance indicators. The enclosed statistics are part of the detailed complaints picture that your organisation is responsible for gathering and publishing. As you will be aware, all of our individual decisions are available online at www.spsso.org.uk/our-findings.

Learning and improvement unit (LIU)

Our 2016-20 draft Strategic Plan, which went to public consultation, proposed introducing a learning and improvement unit to ensure public authorities take the necessary responsibility and actions to handle complaints well and reduce the occurrence of repeat mistakes. It was the most commented on aspect of the draft plan, receiving significant support from respondents, who were mostly public authorities and advice /advocacy organisations. We have been successful in securing funding for a one-year pilot of the LIU until the end of March 2017.

As the strategic plan outlines, the aim of the LIU is to enhance the impact of our work by helping authorities improve public services through learning from complaints. Over recent years, one of the key tools we have developed to support authorities' learning is the Complaints Improvement Framework. This is available on our Valuing Complaints website at: www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/complaintsimprovementframework.

Through the LIU, we will be using the framework to help authorities better assess the efficiency and effectiveness of their overall complaints handling arrangements.

One of the main areas the LIU will focus on is our recommendations. A key part of this work includes providing authorities with additional support and advice on how to meet our recommendations with a view to preventing repeat service failings and complaints. In addition to this extra support we are looking to adopt a tighter escalation process for the very few cases where our recommendations are not being implemented, with the potential to lead to a Special Report.

It is likely that, as part of this work, the way we make recommendations will evolve. As well as continuing to ensure that our recommendations address individual complainants' injustices, the onus will increasingly be on making recommendations that work to support authorities to identify and develop their own solutions for bringing about learning and lasting improvement. The enclosed feedback form invites you to express interest in being involved in this work and I would be very grateful for your response.

Service satisfaction survey

We are always keen to understand your perceptions of the service we provide, and to look at ways in which we can improve this service. We intend to survey you and all the authorities we receive complaints about, specifically around how we meet our published service standards. The questions will be sent to the liaison officer in an electronic survey and we plan to begin this on a rolling basis from September onwards. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Jim Martin
Ombudsman

CC:
Chair of Board / Leader of the Council
SPSO Liaison Contact

SPSO learning and improvement statement

[name of organisation]

We are committed to ensuring that all SPSO recommendations have been complied with and any further appropriate action taken.

We are committed to learning from complaints to prevent repeat failings.

We will ensure that relevant internal and external governance arrangements are in place to review systemic issues.

By signing this document you are agreeing on behalf of your organisation to the points above.

Name:

Signature:

Designation:

Date:

Please return this by 14 September 2016, by post or email, to:

Jim Martin, Ombudsman

SPSO

4 Melville Street

Edinburgh EH3 7NS

Feedback on SPSO recommendations and learning

One of the main areas the Learning and Improvement Unit will focus on is our recommendations. It is likely that, as part of this work, the way we make recommendations will evolve. As well as continuing to ensure that our recommendations address individual complainants' injustices, the onus will increasingly be on making recommendations that work to support authorities to identify and develop their own solutions for bringing about learning and lasting improvement.

We would be very grateful for your response to the questions below.

Please indicate which response best reflects your views.

1. Looking back at recent SPSO recommendations to your organisation, overall were they:

	Not at all	Slightly	Mostly	Totally	Don't know
Relevant					
Proportionate to the problem					

2. Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of SPSO recommendations in:

	Not at all	Slightly	Mostly	Totally	Don't know
Preventing repeat service failings					
Improving complaints handling					

3. How could SPSO improve the recommendations we make?

4. Enabling learning from SPSO complaints

	Not at all	Slightly	Mostly	Totally	Don't know
How satisfied are you that your organisation learns from the findings and recommendations that SPSO makes in relation to your organisation?					

5. What additional support could SPSO provide to enable learning in your organisation?

6. Getting involved

If your authority would like to express an interest in being involved in the LIU's work on recommendations, please give us the contact information of the person we should contact about this.

Name

Position

Email

Thank you. Please return this to SPSO at

Learning and Improvement Unit

SPSO

4 Melville Street

Edinburgh EH3 7NS