

How to complain about the SPSO's customer service

We are committed to offering a high standard of service. We take complaints about our service seriously. We aim to put things right when we fall below the standards we set ourselves. We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our service.

Our Customer Service Standards set out our commitment to:

- communicate effectively with you
- work in an open and fair way, and
- carry out our duties competently and responsibly.

If something goes wrong or you are not satisfied with our service, please tell us. You have the right to complain if you feel we have failed in the service we have provided to you. Our customer service standards and service complaints form are available on our website

www.spsso.org.uk/customer-service-standards

What is a service complaint?

A service complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction from one or more customers or members of the public about the standard of service we have provided.

You can complain about things like:

- failure to provide a service, or inadequate standard of service
- how we met your needs
- how we communicated with you
- how long we took to deal with your case
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process.

This list does not cover everything.

What isn't covered by our service complaints process?

There are also some things we can't deal with through our service complaints process.

This would include where you are unhappy with **our decision** on your complaint or on our independent review of your Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) application. These issues are dealt with through a different process.

The following are also not covered by our service complaints process:

- an expression of disagreement about our decision on a complaint or the evidence taken into account in reaching that decision
- trying to reopen a previously concluded service complaint or to get a service complaint reconsidered
- a request for information
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal

Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including the representative of someone who is unhappy with our service.

How do I complain?

To help us respond to your complaint appropriately and as quickly as possible we recommend that you complete our online service complaints form at www.spsso.org.uk/our-customer-service-standards.

Alternatively, you can complain by phone, in writing, by email or by requesting a paper copy of our form.

We're committed to making our service easy to use for everyone. We'll always ensure we make reasonable adjustments to help customers access and use our services. If you have trouble making a complaint or want this information in another language or format (such as large print, audio, BSL or Braille), please contact us.

How long do I have to make a service complaint?

Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of the event you want to complain about, or finding out that you have a reason to complain.

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you think the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

What happens when I have complained?

Our service complaints process has two stages:

Stage 1: Early resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong. We'll try to take immediate action to resolve the problem whenever this is possible.

It's easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the person or section of our service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff who will try to resolve any problems on the spot.

We'll respond to your complaint at stage 1 within five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Occasionally, we may extend this timeline by up to five working days. We'll only do so when this will make it more likely that we can resolve your complaint at stage 1.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with complaints that have not been resolved at stage 1 and those that are handled at stage 2 straight away. This includes those that are complex and require more detailed investigation or where we feel it is otherwise appropriate to do so. When investigating your complaint we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days, unless we have already discussed this with you
- contact you, where we think this is necessary, to understand why you are unhappy and what outcome you are looking for
- give you a full response to the complaint within 20 working days unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Your complaint will be investigated by a member of our management team. If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we'll tell you and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have responded to your complaint, if you are still unhappy you can ask the Ombudsman's Independent Customer Service Complaints Reviewer (ICSCR) to investigate. Our final response letter to you will include contact details for the ICSCR. You should contact them within one month of receiving our decision.

In some circumstances where there may be concerns over potential conflicts of interest when complaining about SPSO senior staff, your service complaint can be taken straight to the ICSCR without going through the SPSO customer service procedure first. This remains at the discretion of the SPSO.

Information sharing with the ICSCR

Our normal stage 3 customer service complaint process is to give access to both public service complaint and customer service complaint case files to the ICSCR. It would then be up to the ICSCR to decide what is relevant or not. If you do not wish for the ICSCR to have either the public service complaint or both the public service complaint and customer service complaint case files shared with them you should email ise-icscr@sps.gov.scot to inform the SPSO of your decision to not share this information. If you chose to share the public service complaint case files but there are specific points you wish to be redacted, then please also email the SPSO with the details of which points you wish to be redacted.

The ICSCR is a non-statutory process that is independent from the SPSO. There may be times where the ICSCR notifies us they cannot look at or decides not to look at a complaint at stage 3. If this happens you can refer the case back to the Ombudsman directly who will decide what, if any action will be taken at that point.

Your information

We are committed to protecting your privacy. We use information given to us about you and your complaint (or review) for its intended purpose and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, the SPSO Act 2002 and the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015. For more information about how we handle your privacy and protect your information see our website <https://www.sps.gov.uk/privacy-notice> or ask us for a copy.

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint online, in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

We have a **two-stage service complaints process**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. If it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.

Stage one: early resolution

We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can. In exceptional circumstances we may extend this by up to five working days.

If you are unhappy with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at stage two.

Stage two: investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at stage one. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage if it is clear that they are complex, need detailed investigation, or it is otherwise appropriate to do so.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**. We will give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** unless this is not possible. In such circumstances we will advise you and keep you updated on our progress.

The Independent Customer Service Complaints Reviewer

If, after receiving our final decision on your service complaint, you remain unhappy with our response or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the ICSCR to consider it. You must make your request within one month of receiving our decision letter.

We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final response.

How to contact us



Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

If writing to us, please specify on the envelope if it is for the attention of SPSO, SWF or INWO.

Opening hours: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 9am-5pm,
Tuesday 10am-5pm

If you would like to visit our office in person, you must arrange an appointment first by using the contact details below.



A freepost envelope can be supplied if this is required.



SPSO freephone	0800 377 7330
SWF freephone	0800 014 7299
INWO freephone	0800 008 6112



SPSO website	www.spsso.org.uk
SWF website	www.spsso.org.uk/scottishwelfarefund
INWO website	www.inwo.spsso.org.uk
SPSO contact form	www.spsso.org.uk/contact-form
SWF contact form	www.spsso.org.uk/scottishwelfarefund/contact-form
INWO contact form	www.inwo.spsso.org.uk/contact-form

Calls to and from SPSO phone lines may be recorded to check the quality of our service and help us do our job to help you. More details are in the privacy notice: **www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice**. Please ask if you want to confirm if a call is or is not being recorded or if you would like to know what options may be available to you if you do not wish to be recorded.

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