

2018-19 Annual Customer Service Complaints Report

From: **John Stevenson, Head of Improvement, Standards and Engagement**
 To: **SPSO Leadership Team**
 Date: **28 May 2019**

Purpose

1. This report has been prepared to provide an overview of all Customer Service Complaints (CSCs) received and responded to by the SPSO during the business year 2018-19. The report also provides a summary of outcomes, trends and actions taken as a result of these complaints including key learning points for SPSO in relation to service improvement.
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Reporting customer service complaints

2. In line with CSA requirements, details of all customer service complaints in 2018/19 were recorded and reported on a quarterly basis. A summary of the outcome of complaints received and responded to during the year was also published on our website on a quarterly basis. These reports provide information on our performance in handling customer service complaints in line with SPSO's Customer Service Complaints Handling Procedure.
 3. This annual report brings together the information already reported quarterly to provide the annual overview of customer service complaints. This information is published to help ensure transparency in our handling of customer service complaints and to demonstrate to our customers that we value complaints and, wherever possible, we use the learning from them to improve our services.
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Annual statistics for customer service complaints 2018-19

Received & closed

4. Table 1 provides a breakdown of complaints received and closed during the year.

Table 1 (2018-19)	<i>Received</i>	<i>Closed</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	41	42
Stage 2 - Investigation	9	11
Escalated Complaints (escalated from stage 1 to stage 2)	15	15
Total	65	68

5. Where a difference exists in the number of cases received and the number of cases closed (in this case Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints), this is due to cases received in the previous year being closed in 2018-19.
6. Complaints may be closed at different stages of the CSC procedure:

Closures at Stage 1 - Frontline resolution refers to complaints closed at Stage 1 of the procedure, with no escalation to the next stage

Closures at Stage 2 - Investigation refers to complaints handled and closed directly at Stage 2 of the procedure (Frontline resolution was not attempted)

Closures of Escalated Complaints – refers to complaints handled at Stage 1 and subsequently escalated to, and closed at Stage 2.

7. The year 2018-19 saw a very similar performance in relation to complaints received in the previous year (2017/18) with 68 service complaints closed this year compared to 71 last year.

Upheld/Not upheld

8. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints upheld and not upheld during the full year 2018-19.

Table 2 (2018-19)	<i>Upheld</i>	<i>Not Upheld</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% upheld</i>	<i>2017/18</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	12	30	42	29%	14%
Stage 2 - Investigation	1	10	11	9%	25%
Escalated Complaints	4	11	15	27%	54%
Total	17	51	68	25%	N/A

9. The number of upheld service complaints is generally low in relation to the overall volumes of customer transactions delivered each year. Nevertheless, upheld service complaints (and in some cases, not upheld service complaints) provide us with a valuable opportunity to learn when things go wrong, so that we may improve our service provision in the future.
10. Of note is the shift of upheld complaints towards Stage 1 of the procedure, with 29% being upheld at Stage 1 this year as opposed to 14% the previous year. In turn, the upheld complaints at Stage 2 have reduced to 9% this year from 25% the previous year. This perhaps illustrates that service complaints are being resolved close to the point of service delivery; one of the key requirements of effective complaints handling.

Timescales

11. The timescales by which we measure our performance against the requirements of the complaints procedure are:
 - 5 working days at stage 1

- 20 working days at stage 2
- 20 working days for escalated complaints.

12. Table 3 illustrates our performance against the timescales in the year to date. For stage 1 complaints achievement is 79% and for stage 2 (including escalated) achievement is 83%.

Table 3 (2018-19)	<i>Met timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Did not meet timescale (cases)</i>	<i>Total number of working days</i>	<i>Average time in working days to close</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	35	7	167	4
Stage 2 - Investigation	8	3	237	21.5
Escalated Complaints	13	2	260	17

Summary of complaints outcomes and service failures

13. Details of the upheld service complaints have been reported in each of our quarterly published updates. The main reasons we upheld these complaints related to delays in progressing our work, and a failure to communicate effectively. These included:

- A delay in contacting our customer to discuss their complaint
- A delay in calling a customer when we said we would
- A delay in allocating, and the progressing a complaint
- A delay in contacting our customer by an agreed date.
- A delay in contacting our customer after the complaint was acknowledged
- A delay in allocating a case and a delay in requesting further advice in relation to review request.
- A delay in progressing our work and a lack of communication with our customer
- Correspondence being overlooked
- A failure to communicate effectively which led our customer to attend the office
- We did not fully explain our procedure to a body under our jurisdiction
- A failure to communicate by our customer's preferred method
- The complaint summary published did not reflect that the complaint was a 'no finding', rather than 'not upheld'
- We did not clearly explain the basis for our decision on a complaint
- A failure to identify that our customer's dissatisfaction should have been handled as a service complaint
- A letter to the Ombudsman was handled as a service complaint, however, we failed to explain why or to provide details of the service complaints process
- In responding to a service complaint (at Stage 1), we did not provide the response under a specific heading. While we did address the issues complained of, we accepted that a

specific heading may have made our communication clearer.

Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)

14. During the year we contracted two Independent Complaints Review services. In total, they received 15 service complaints. One was subsequently withdrawn. Of the remaining 14 cases decided by the Independent Reviewers, no complaints were upheld.

Learning from complaints

15. The SPSO is committed to improving our service as a result of learning from customer service complaints. In addition to apologising where things have gone wrong, and where possible putting things right for our customer when our service has not met our service standards, we also seek to learn the lessons from any service failures and address any systemic issues that may be identified.
16. In the course of reviewing customer service complaints, instances of service failure are highlighted to the Leadership Team through our quarterly management reports, and where appropriate, to the relevant staff and managers involved where appropriate.
17. The two main areas of poor service provision identified throughout the year 2018-19 related to communications and delays. In each case, we apologised for the failing and we reminded staff of the service standards we commit to provide. We will take account of the findings in respect of communications in a planned update of the SPSO communications strategy.
18. We will also ask our internal communications group to consider how to enhance the standard of our external communications in relation to casework to ensure we meet our service standards commitments.

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SPSO