

4 October 2017

## **Annual Letter from SPSO**

Dear Chief Executive,

I am pleased to send you SPSO's annual letter with statistics relating to cases we handled about your organisation in 2016-17. The statistics cover Jim Martin's final year in office; I took up the office of Ombudsman on 1 May 2017.

### **SPSO recommendations**

We provide these statistics to inform authorities about, and help them to build a picture of, service issues about which the public are unhappy. I and my team are keen to support you in making lasting improvements to services and so develop the trust and confidence the public has in them. One of the ways we do this is through the recommendations we make. As you may be aware, we have changed, and continue to develop, our approach to making recommendations. This has led to a shift in being more strongly focused on outcomes in relation to services as well as remedying injustice to individuals.

These changes began in April this year and were the result of careful planning and research. I and my team are grateful to the organisations and other customers who gave (and continue to give) us feedback. We expect our approach to evolve in light of our own learning. Critical to this is your feedback and I encourage you to continue to give us your views on our recommendations. Specifically, we would be interested to know of any challenges to implementing SPSO recommendations and how we could overcome them.

Please let me know if you have feedback on the new approach by contacting our Learning and Improvement team at [liu@spsso.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:liu@spsso.gsi.gov.uk).

### **Complaints data and reporting**

The enclosed SPSO statistics are just part of the detailed complaints picture that your organisation is responsible for gathering and publishing.

As you will know, in line with the model complaints handling procedure (CHP), each authority is required to report and publicise complaints information on a quarterly and annual basis. This includes the publication of your organisation's annual complaints report detailing your performance against the complaints performance indicators.

This annual performance information is a requirement of the model CHP: but it is more than simply another set of data. Used well it provides you with an opportunity to understand your complaints to give insight into your services which, in turn, enables learning and improvement. The data is also an excellent platform for you and others in the sector to

benchmark performance and to identify and work together on common challenges. This is only possible if your data is accurate and up-to-date. Through the work of your sector's complaints network group, I have been made aware of inconsistencies in the quality and accuracy of the draft 2016-17 data presented by some councils. I urge you to reflect on how and when you collect, collate and report your complaints data to ensure that it is timely, robust, and has integrity.

Ideally, learning from complaints should be embedded in governance structures, to promote an organisational 'valuing complaints' culture. This includes ensuring recommendations are shared with the relevant internal and external decision-makers.

### **Best practice website**

We have refreshed our website for complaints handlers and governance teams: [www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk) I encourage you to take a look, and would love to know what you think of it, including whether there is further information you think it would be helpful to include. The site includes:

- how to embed complaints and complaints data into overall governance arrangements
- resources and techniques for learning and improving as a result of complaints
- tools for handling complaints
- information about our training courses and e-learning materials.

You may be interested in particular, in our recently revised and updated guidance on how to make a good apology, available on the leaflets and guidance page of our [website](#).

### **Customer service satisfaction survey**

We are keen to understand authorities' views of our service, and to look at ways in which we can improve. In 2016-17, we began to survey all the authorities about which we received complaints, specifically around how we meet our published service standards. We will publish findings from this work later this year, and continue to invite feedback by survey in 2017-18.

I would welcome any feedback you may have on this letter and on any aspect of our work – you don't need to wait for an invitation!

Yours sincerely



Rosemary Agnew  
**Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**

CC:  
Leader of the Council  
SPSO Liaison Contact