



How to complain about a public service

Tell the organisation that you are unhappy and you want to complain. This will give them the chance to put things right.

You can complain in person at any of the organisation's public offices. You can also complain to them by phone, by letter or by email. Ask for their complaints leaflet or procedure. It is important to follow their procedure so they know you are making a complaint.

This leaflet explains the process of complaining about any organisation that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) can consider complaints about, and gives an example of what to put in a complaint letter if you want to complain in writing. Please keep a copy of any complaint letters you send.

Getting help

People can help you make a complaint. You could ask a friend, a relative, a councillor, your MSP, an advocate, the Citizens Advice Bureau or anyone else you trust to make the complaint on your behalf.

The SPSO is an independent service at the very end of the complaints process. This means that we can't help you to make a complaint. We recommend using an advocate to support you through the process.

You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau can also help you make your complaint.

Citizens Advice Scotland

Website: www.cas.org.uk

Or check your phone book for your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Tel: **0131 510 9410** Email: enquiry@siaa.org.uk Website: www.siaa.org.uk

For complaints about the NHS: **Patient Advice and Support Service**

Tel: **0800 917 2127** Website: www.cas.org.uk/pass

How to complain:

A step by step guide

Stage 1: Frontline Resolution

Make your complaint directly to the organisation. You can do this in person, by phone, by letter or email. The organisation will try to resolve your complaint within **5 working days** if they can. They may respond to you by phone or in person to try and resolve things. If you are unhappy with the response, you can ask the organisation to consider your complaint at stage 2.

Stage 2: Investigation

At stage 2 you should receive an acknowledgement of your complaint within **3 working days**. You will be given a decision as soon as possible. This should be after no more than **20 working days** unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time. If your complaint is complex or needs more detailed investigation, the organisation may look at your complaint immediately at this stage without going through stage 1.

Please note that the two-stage process applies to nearly all public service organisations but there are some exceptions, for example, complaints about water providers. We recommend that you always check with the organisation directly about their complaints procedure.

Still unhappy?

If your complaint is unresolved after you have gone through the organisations full complaints procedure, you can take it to us at the SPSO. The SPSO is an independent and free service.

You will need to put your complaint in writing to the SPSO, explaining why you are still unhappy and what you would like us to do. You will need to give us a copy of the organisation's final letter, which should contain details about how to contact the SPSO. If the organisation does not give you this letter, you should contact them to request this.

Example of what to put in a complaint letter

Please keep a copy of your complaint letters.

To: The Complaints Team
Job title
Public service organisation
Public service organisation's address

Your name
Address
Phone number
Date

Dear _____

COMPLAINT

I would like to complain about your service.

- Give details of what has gone wrong and tell them what you think would resolve the problem.
- Clearly explain what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint. Do you want an apology, a change in policy, a service that should have been provided?
- You can ask the organisation to explain how they made their decision.
- Include information about what you have already done to try to sort things out. You may also find it helpful to include copies of previous letters, photos, statements etc.

Please contact me so that I know that you have received my complaint and that it is being investigated. I would also like to know when you will send me a full reply.

Yours sincerely,

Your name

If you are experiencing delays

Sometimes a complaint investigation can take longer than expected. The organisation should keep you informed if there is going to be a delay. If you are experiencing delays and have not had an update, we recommend that you take these steps:

- Contact the organisation to check that the matter is being dealt with as a complaint (and not as an enquiry or a request for services).
- Next, you can ask for an update on the progress of your complaint, and an estimated timescale of when they expect to respond.
- If you have received a stage 1 response and you remain unhappy, you should request that your complaint is moved to stage 2.

Taking your complaint to the SPSO

If you are unhappy after you have had your final response from the organisation, you can send your complaint to the SPSO to consider. The SPSO's Assessment and Guidance team is happy to help with any questions you may have about how to submit your complaint or what the process involves. You can call them on SPSO freephone: **0800 377 7330**. You can also visit the SPSO office.

Your information

We are committed to protecting your privacy. We use information given to us about you and your application [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. To find out more about how we handle your information and your rights, see our website www.spsso.org.uk/privacy-notice or ask us for a copy.

How to contact the SPSO



A freepost envelope can be supplied if this is required



SPSO, Bridgeside House, 99 McDonald Road, Edinburgh EH7 4NS

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



Freephone **0800 377 7330**

This line is open during the following hours: Mon, Wed & Fri 9am-1pm,
Tues & Thurs 1pm-5pm



Website www.spsso.org.uk



Online contact form www.spsso.org.uk/contact-form

You can fill in our complaints form online at forms.spsso.org.uk/spsso

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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Please contact us if you would like this leaflet in another language or format (such as large print, audio, BSL or Braille).