

2018-19 Q4 Customer Service Complaints Report

From: **John Stevenson, Head of Improvement, Standards and Engagement**
To: **SPSO Leadership Team**
Date: **13 May 2019**

Purpose

1. This report has been prepared to provide a summary of Customer Service Complaints (CSCs) received and responded to by the SPSO during Quarter 4 (Q4) of the year 2018-19. It also reflects the performance in the year to date. Where appropriate the report seeks to provide 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. Details of all CSCs are recorded (on Workpro) and we publish on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response. The CSCs we received are analysed for trend information to ensure that, where possible, we identify areas where our service could improve and take appropriate action. Further reference is made to this in the 'summary of complaints outcomes' (paragraphs 16 to 23).
 3. We publish this report on a quarterly basis to help ensure transparency in our complaints handling and to demonstrate to our customers that complaints can influence our service. We also publish, on an annual basis, more detailed information on our performance in handling complaints. This includes statistics showing the volumes and types of complaints and key performance details, including the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.
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Q4 statistics for customer service complaints

Received & closed

4. Table 1 provides a breakdown of complaints received and closed during Q4.

Table 1 (Q4)	<i>Received</i>	<i>Closed</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline Resolution	9	9
Stage 2 - Investigation	3	4
Escalated Complaints (escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2)	4	4
Total	16	17

5. Where a difference exists in the number of cases received in the quarter and the number of cases closed in the quarter (in this case Stage 2 investigations), this is due to cases received in an earlier quarter being closed in Q4.

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. Q4 saw a decrease in complaints received and closed, when compared to Q3. In Q3, we received 22 complaints, as opposed to 16 in Q4. The total volume of service complaints received in the year is 65. This is a slight reduction to the total received in the previous year (2017-18) of 71. Service complaint numbers continue to be relatively low for an organisation of our size.

8. Table 2 provides a breakdown of complaints received and closed in the full year 2018-19.

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

Upheld/Not upheld

9. Table 3 provides a breakdown of complaints upheld and not upheld during Q4. Table 4 provides data reflecting the upheld and not upheld rates in the full year 2018-19.

Table 3 (Q4)	<i>Upheld</i>	<i>Not Upheld</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% upheld</i>
Stage 1 - Frontline resolution	5	4	9	56%
Stage 2 - Investigation	0	4	4	0%
Escalated Complaints	2	2	4	50%
Total	7	10	17	

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

10. 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.

11. In Q4, the upheld service complaints identified issues in relation to communication failings, delay and complaints handling failings. Further information is provided in the 'summary of complaints outcomes' detailed below. Individual staff members have been reminded of the service standards that we commit to deliver.

Timescales

12. 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.

13. Table 5 illustrates our performance in relation to timescales during Q4.

Table 5 (Q4)	<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	9	0	21	2
Stage 2 - Investigation	3	1	82	20
Escalated Complaints	3	1	59	15

14. During Q4, the timescales were met in 100% of the Stage 1 complaints we handled, and in 75% of the Stage 2 (including escalated) complaints we handled.

15. Table 6 illustrates our performance against the timescales in the year 2018-19. For Stage 1 complaints we met the timescales in 83% of cases. For Stage 2 (including escalated) we met the timescales in 81% of cases.

Table 6 (Year 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

16. In Q4, we upheld seven service complaints. Five were upheld at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. Two were upheld at Stage 2. The details of these cases are presented in the following paragraphs.

Fully upheld at Stage 1 (201808545)

17. We failed to meet our commitment to communicate effectively in this case. We failed to call the customer when we should have. We apologised for this failing.

Fully upheld at Stage 1 (201808719)

18. In this case, there was a delay in allocating the case for action. There was a further delay in the way in which the case was then progressed through our procedure. We explained that factors that led to these delays to our customer. We also apologised for the poor level of service provided.

Fully upheld at Stage 1 (201809631)

19. We failed to contact the customer by the due date. We apologised for this service failure. We reminded staff of the importance of effective and timely communication and we asked the Complaints Reviewer to ensure they effectively tracked required activity on case files.

Fully upheld at Stage 1 (201809731)

20. In this case, we did not meet a requirement to communicate with our customer within ten days of acknowledging their complaint. We explained how this happened and apologised for our service failure.

Fully upheld at Stage 1 (201810862)

21. In communicating our decision, we did not clearly explain the basis for the decision reached. We also failed to ask our customer for information in relation to the complaint. We apologised for this service failure and we reopened the case to ensure a further review of the evidence was completed.

Fully upheld escalated case (201808585)

22. The customer was dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint. They also complained that this dissatisfaction had not been handled through our service complaints procedure. We explained that we had taken action to ensure that the case was handled in line with our procedures, but we accepted that we should have identified the issue as a service complaint. We apologised for this service failure.

Fully upheld escalated case (201810341)

23. There were delays in our handling of this case, together with a failure to effectively communicate with the customer. We explained the reasons for the delay. We also acknowledged that we should have communicated more effectively. We apologised for these service failures.

Independent Customer Complaints Reviewer (ICCR)

24. The Independent Reviewer closed four cases in Q4: 201706273, 201806180, 201806483 and 201807297. None of these complaints were upheld as there was no evidence of service failure.

25. In addition, the Independent Reviewer received a fifth referral, which was withdrawn before a decision was made.

Next steps

26. This report has been prepared to update the Leadership Team. Thereafter it is shared with the Casework Performance Group and the Service Improvement Forum. Its findings are also shared internally and made available online.

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SPSO