

28 February 2013

Kevin Stewart MSP
Convener of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Dear Convener

Thank you for your letter of 12 February.

Attached at Annex 1 is a high level report as requested on how our Strategic Plan 2012-16 is being implemented and how we are communicating this externally.

In response to your requests for elaboration and / or clarification:

1. In your opening remarks you observed that “the demand for our services is increasing.” and that you anticipated receiving “around 4100 to 4200 complaints”. (col1647) This would seem to equate to an increase in complaints of between 200-300 or as you suggest 5 to 7 per cent. Given the focus on the outreach work you highlight by Paul McFadden and his complaints standards authority team are you able to provide any explanation for what appears to be an inexorable rise?

In the first three quarters of 2012-13, people have continued to bring us complaints about new areas (such as water and prison healthcare complaints). There has also been an increase in some established areas of jurisdiction such as health and housing. In the first three quarters of 2012-13, the overall rise in cases received compared with the same period in the previous year is 7%. It will not be clear until the end of the financial year in which areas complaints have increased and by how much, or where there may have been a drop. As we do each year, we will provide detailed statistics on case numbers through our usual channels – our annual report, the statistics section of our website (www.spsso.org.uk/statistics) and the annual letters we send to Chief Executives, Chairs of governing bodies, regulators and others (these letters are also provided in the statistics section of our website).

The increase in new areas, however, appears to be slowing because of the work we have done to manage transitions and, as your question appears to recognise, because of our outreach work. Our last two annual reports contain detail about water and prison complaints and highlight the work that we have done to make the transitions as smooth as possible and to deal with the backlogs we inherited from predecessor organisations. You may also like to read p14 of the 2011-12 annual report, which is specifically about the policy and outreach work we do when asked to take on new areas, to ensure the least possible disruption to service users and other stakeholders. To be clear, this outreach work is carried out by our

policy, advice and communications people. The impact of the CSA in reducing complaints to the SPSO is a different matter and I answer it in the next point.

Self-evidently, the inexorable rise will continue as long as the Scottish Government and Parliament pass legislation or in other ways make changes that result in the abolition, merger or setting up of bodies, which mean that functions are transferred to us, or that in other ways our remit is expanded. I detailed the upcoming potential expansions in section 2 of my briefing, in which I also informed the Committee of the constraints we have and the action we are taking to help address the rise.

2. Linked to the above is the target you referred to for Paul's team of looking at around 100 bodies next year. Could you indicate if the target is solely set by reference to the number of bodies who standardise complaints and whether any target is set to cover a reduction in the numbers of complaints arising from those bodies adopting the standardised approach? Could you indicate what monitoring is in place to quantify the benefits arising from this work? (cols 1648 & 1661)

The target refers to the next area that we are focusing on in terms of delivering standardised model complaints handling procedures (CHPs). This is explained in section 3 of the briefing, where I said 'Our focus for 2013/14 is to publish and implement the model CHP for the remaining (approximately 100) bodies in the 'sector' covering the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and associated bodies, including agencies, NDPBs and other sponsored bodies'. The dedicated chapter in the 2011-12 annual report (pp 15-17) detailed how we prioritised the different sectors, beginning with local government and registered social landlords.

The second part of the question is about whether any target is set to cover a reduction in the numbers of complaints arising from those bodies adopting the standardised approach. Here I would again refer the Committee to the CSA chapters of the 2011-12 and 2010-11 annual reports where we explain the background to our CSA work.

The Public Services Reform Act 2010 (the PSR Act), which built on the Crerar and Sinclair reports, gave us the authority to lead the development of simplified and standardised complaints handling procedures (CHPs) across the public sector. The primary aim of Crerar and Sinclair (and, subsequently, Parliament and, therefore, CSA) was not to reduce complaints, but to simplify the system for people and provide a clear, standardised procedure, therefore making it easier for people to complain and, through their complaints, to bring about improvements in service delivery.

We quote Douglas Sinclair in the 2010-11 annual report: 'The benefits of introducing standardised complaints handling systems are considerable and should not be underestimated. Better systems will lead to better outcomes for the public – both through having easier access to processes and then having to spend less time in the system. However, the most important benefit will be that services will improve with the more effective learning of the lessons from complaints, and this will benefit all consumers of a service, not only those who raise complaints.'

As we outline in the 2011-12 annual report (p15) and expand on in much more detail on the CSA's website (www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk), the CSA's second aim is to improve complaints handling and reduce escalation through the complaints handling procedures (CHPs) and to the SPSO. These were, and are, our main aims in developing the CHPs in partnership with the different sectors, and this is why they contain the key elements of accessibility, empowerment, 'getting it right first time', senior management sign-off of complaints, improved transparency and learning through recording and reporting.

I agree with Douglas Sinclair that the positive impact of well-handled complaints will be seen in improved services. It is also possible to point to significant efficiencies that can be brought about by handling complaints well and preventing escalation in line with the CSA model CHPs. However, the possible outcomes of the two separate strands of the CSA work (simplification and improvement in how complaints are handled) are different and potentially conflicting in terms of numbers of complaints. It is not possible to say whether there will be a reduction in the numbers of complaints arising from the bodies adopting the standardised approach. It is possible - and we have identified this as a risk to our Audit and Advisory Committee, the Scottish Government and the SPCB - that there could be a rise as a consequence of the move to a more user-focused, streamlined and accessible complaints system across the sectors.

A further barrier to setting targets on reduction is that, as the Crerar and Sinclair reviews highlighted, there has never been reliable data about the level of complaints handling in the public sector. This is one of the many challenges for the CSA, not least in terms of measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of the changes it is implementing.

We will remain alert to the possibility of increasing complaints over the coming months and are monitoring closely those bodies who have already implemented the model CHP. Continued focus on supporting bodies through direct engagement, training and guidance to improve their investigation and resolution of complaints is the key to managing this risk. However, failure to provide these activities to sufficient levels because of a lack of resource does in itself present a risk.

The CSA is, for the first time in Scotland (and as far as we aware anywhere in the world), creating a common definition of a complaint in the public sector and establishing standardised recording and reporting of complaints. While it is not possible to set targets until comparable numbers are gathered and reported, our ground-breaking work means that, over the next few years, once the CHPs are developed, implemented and embedded, it will become possible.

3. You discussed the public's difficulty in understanding where to go with complaints (col 1651). I appreciate that this is not a new position and we would find it helpful to understand the actions that the SPSO are undertaking to tackle what appears to be a systemic problem.

The most significant new action we are taking to address this systemic problem is through making it simpler and easier for people to complain by taking forward Crerar, Sinclair and the Parliament's intent to create one standard process, as outlined above, and to simplify the complaints handling landscape. Parliament's original idea of creating the SPSO as a one-stop-shop has been expanded over the years (I dwell on this in the 2011-12 annual report and describe the expansions to our remit over the past ten years on pages 6-7).

Section 2.1 of my briefing outlines changes to the landscape that have an impact on our office. As in the past, some of these come about in response to specific legislation (e.g. water and prison complaints transferred to us under the PSR and Scottish Commissions and Commissioners etc Acts). Others come about as part of policy changes, and some of the examples I gave in the briefing were social work complaints, health and social care services integration and prison health complaints.

We sometimes find ourselves in the position of pointing out a lack of consideration of how complaints should be handled when changes are proposed or made to how services are delivered. In my briefing I provided an example to the Committee where I wrote, in relation to health and social care integration, that: 'We are continuing to highlight our concerns about the lack of reference to how complaints should be handled, given the overlapping procedures

and legislative routes for complaints under the proposed integration model. There are significant implications for us in terms of how to deal with complaints that come to us through the different routes.'

Other actions we take to tackle the problem as part of our everyday service are:

- A freephone advice line is available throughout office hours with advice team staff on hand to help the public make complaints to the right organisation at the right time
- A drop-in service available throughout office hours with advice team staff on hand to provide support
- A complaints reviewer is always available to handle more technical jurisdictional queries, on the phone/email/in person
- Printed leaflets and online information for the public
- Printed leaflets and online information for organisations, spelling out when and how to signpost people to us appropriately

By way of background, signposting was an issue dealt with in some detail by the Crerar and Sinclair reviews. In line with the Sinclair report recommendation, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent scoping study into this area (see <http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/scotland/publications/complaints-signposting-in-the-public-sector-report-of-a-scoping-study>) and the recommendation was not pursued.

4. Anne McTaggart asked what defines high quality service in the eyes of your customers (col 1652) and we would welcome, in answer to her question, your thoughts on such a definition and in particular how you are intending to have the service you provide assessed.

In response to the first part of the question, different customers will have different definitions. I attach as Annex 2 a selection of unsolicited communications from customers to SPSO complaints reviewers. From these comments, I would take it that quality service in the eyes of our customers is accessible, professional, prompt, thorough and clear. You may also wish to refer to our service standards, which are on our website at www.spsso.org.uk/about-us/our-service-standards.

As for assessment of our service, we use the usual tools available to organisations – we regularly survey users to ask them their views (as highlighted on pp 10 -11 of our 2011-12 annual report and discussed at the evidence session where we provided detail on our most recent Craigforth survey). We take very seriously the service delivery complaints made about us and use the feedback as learning. We told the Committee about this in the evidence session (see col 1662), including pointing them to the chapter of our 2011-12 annual report about complaints made about our service. That chapter (pp 50-51) outlines what we do with the feedback to inform improvements of our service.

In the evidence session, Niki Maclean also provided the Committee with details of our quality assurance process (col 1652), which, as we state in our 2011-12 annual report, is externally reviewed by our internal auditors.

5. Anne McTaggart also asked how you will continue to deliver a quality service to your customers in the face of rising numbers (col 1653), would we be correct in interpreting your answer as suggesting that timescales will be extended with quality maintained?

You would be correct in your interpretation; if we need to make adjustments to our service then quality of decision making will be protected which may mean that timescale targets are adjusted from time to time.

6. I note that you monitor implementation of all recommendations; can you provide a note of the number of such recommendations together with details of the time it took bodies to implement them during the period in question? (col 1656)

As detailed in the 2011-12 annual report (p9), we issued 619 recommendations last year. As we also say in the report (p9), and as Niki Maclean said in her evidence (col 1659), 88% of recommendations were complied with within the timetable set. She also stated that while we work hard to ensure that bodies meet the timescales, it is ultimately a matter for them. All the recommendations (i.e. 100%) set in 2011-12 have now been complied with.

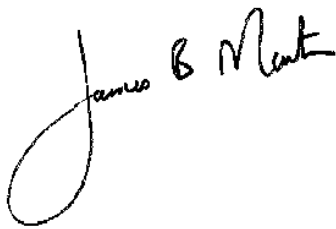
We set organisations different deadlines for different recommendations – for example, we may give them two weeks to write a full and meaningful apology and three months to carry out a review of a policy. If a recommendation is not complied with within the timetable set, our complaints reviewers will follow up with the organisation on a weekly basis until it is.

7. You helpfully provided details around the Scottish Government logging and monitoring of recommendations and also around the approach taken by Health Boards in this area. Could you indicate what if anything is undertaken by local government in this regard?

It is relatively straightforward for sectors to share learning from complaints to bring about improvement where there is a coordinating 'umbrella body' (as Emma Gray put it in her evidence (col 1659)). A different approach may be more suited to local authorities, which are democratically elected and accountable locally. I am not aware if anything is undertaken in the local government sector by, say, COSLA or SOLACE to log and monitor recommendations on anything other than an individual basis.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the CSA has established a forum for sharing learning from complaints within the local government sector. The CSA set up a local authority complaints handlers network, which is now run by representatives from the sector itself, to benchmark and share best practice, and the network has committed to developing 'learning from complaints' guidance. More about this work is available on the CSA website which hosts the network, at www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James B Martin', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Jim Martin
Ombudsman

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Annex 1: Strategic Plan

In response to your letter of 12 February 2013 I am setting out below a written update on the implementation of the SPSO strategic plan.

From 2012 onwards there has been a statutory requirement for the SPSO to prepare a four year strategic plan, which is considered by the SPCB. As you will have noted from the 2012-16 strategic plan that was discussed at our previous evidence session to the Committee in March 2012, under the strategic plan sit annual business plans. It is through these annual business plans that we implement the strategic plan.

Performance against these annual business plans is reported through the annual report that is laid before the Parliament. Historically, the Local Government Committee has invited the Ombudsman to give evidence on the annual report following publication. As well as being a management tool for the operation of the business, our annual business plans are publicly available and can be found in the Business Information section of our website (www.spsso.org.uk/about-us/management-information) This section also hosts the minutes of our senior management team meetings, at which we discuss and record progress against the business plans. We put this information into the public domain as part of our ongoing commitment to openness, transparency and accountability.

The business plans are supported by measures and targets that are reviewed annually (the 2012-13 measures are set out below in Annex 1A). As section 4 of the strategic plan lays out, key aspects of these performance measures are reported on annually. It has been agreed with the SPCB that details of performance against each of the individual measures will be included in the 2012-13 annual report.

It is worth noting that the strategic objectives within the strategic plan directly reflect the statutory obligations of the office (as set out on page 12 of the strategic plan) rather than being discretionary objectives. We therefore establish priorities within the statutory framework within which we work. We also have a statutory obligation to review and update the strategic plan in light of any changes or events that would impact on our ability to fulfil our statutory functions.

In addition to these formal, statutory mechanisms for reporting on the implementation of the strategic plan, as an open, accountable organisation, we regularly report on the work carried out in relation to strategic objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 during the course of each business year. For example, I know the Committee will be familiar with our publications in relation to casework findings through our monthly compendiums (www.spsso.org.uk/reports) our annual letters to the bodies within each of the main sectors (www.spsso.org.uk/statistics) and our updates on progress in relation to the Complaints Standards Authority (www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk). Alongside these, and in line with good practice, we ensure that all significant relevant corporate documents such as audit reports are available to the public. We make available a significant amount of information about the way we work, our goals, outputs and targets, to a level proportionate to the resources we have available for non-casework activities. By publishing such a large volume of information, we ensure that details of the key areas of our work and our progress against our objectives are widely available.



Business Priorities

2012 – 2013

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2012-16

The high level objectives for the office maintain the focus on our 5 key strands of work.

Strategic objective 1: To provide a high quality, independent complaints handling service

By developing our capacity as complaints handlers to be able to deliver individual benefit to our customers; by being accessible and dealing with all enquiries and complaints impartially, consistently, effectively, proportionately and in a timely manner; and by producing clear, accurate and influential decisions about complaints.

Strategic objective 2: To support public service improvement in Scotland

By continuing to raise informed awareness of the role of the SPSO and to feed back and capitalise on the learning from our consideration of individual enquiries and complaints, for example, through thematic reports, and by working in partnership with public service deliverers, policy makers, scrutiny bodies and regulators to promote good administrative practice.

Strategic objective 3: To improve complaint handling by public service providers

By using our expertise and resources to monitor, promote and facilitate the sharing of best practice and support service providers in improving their complaints handling.

Strategic objective 4: To simplify the design and operation of the complaint handling system in Scottish public services

By working in partnership with service providers, regulators and other key stakeholders to facilitate the development of and compliance with simplified, standardised and user-focussed Complaints Handling Procedures across the public sector as an integral part of the wider administrative justice system in Scotland.

Strategic objective 5: To be an accountable, best value organisation

By making best use of our resources and demonstrating continuous improvement in our operational efficiency and supporting the professional development of our staff.

Equalities commitments

Our five equalities commitments form an integral part of the Strategic Plan. They are:

1. to take proactive steps to identify and reduce potential barriers to ensure that our service is accessible to all.
2. to identify common equality issues (explicit and implicit) within complaints brought to our office and feed back learning from such complaints to all stakeholders.
3. to ensure that we inform people who are taking forward a complaint of their rights and of any available support, and that we encourage public authorities to do the same.
4. to ensure that we play our part in ensuring that service providers understand their duties to promote equality within their complaints handling procedures.
5. to monitor the diversity of our workforce and supply chain and take positive steps where under-representation exists.

BUSINESS PLAN KEY PRIORITIES 2012-13

1. Deliver an efficient and effective complaint handling service, working to stretching but achievable targets, continuously building quality and accessibility.
2. Share strategic lessons from our casework with service providers and appropriate scrutiny bodies; ensure service providers implement SPSO recommendations; and use communications tools effectively to promote understanding of the SPSO.
3. Through the Complaints Standards Authority and training and outreach activities, build and coordinate sectoral complaints handling networks and facilitate the sharing of good practice in complaints handling
4. Lead the simplification and standardisation of complaints handling by working in partnership to develop and implement model Complaints Handling Procedures (CHPs), based upon the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles and Guidance on a Model Complaints Handling Procedure.
5. Deliver operational efficiency, effectiveness and accountability through clearly defined priorities, performance measures and resources that meet business needs, while supporting development of new areas of business.

Strategic objective 1: To provide a high quality, user-focussed independent complaints handling service

By developing our capacity as complaints handlers to be able to deliver individual benefit to our customers; by being accessible and dealing with all enquiries and complaints impartially, consistently, effectively, proportionately and in a timely manner; and by producing clear, accurate and influential decisions about complaints.

Key Priority 1: Deliver an efficient and effective complaint handling service, working to stretching but achievable targets, continuously building quality and accessibility

a. Improve case handling times	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handle complaints efficiently to meet relevant, stretching casework time targets to ensure timely decisions on cases• Effectively provide advice to members of the public on how to progress their premature complaints• Successfully integrate or expand any new areas of jurisdiction to ensure a seamless transfer and effective ongoing resource with minimal disruption to service• Ensure effective signposting to relevant advisory and regulatory and support services as applicable
b. Improve quality of casework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop specialist knowledge sets to ensure a requisite knowledge bank is available to support casework• Monitor the complaints handling process to ensure it reflects best practice and ensure complaints team members have the requisite skills and resources to implement the complaints handling process• Monitor the quality assurance and service delivery complaints systems to ensure they reflect best practice and support continuous improvement• Effectively manage processes for obtaining expert advice (legal and jurisdictional) to ensure range of expertise, timeliness, quality and value for money
c. Deliver an accessible, high quality service to all service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that SPSO incorporates best practice in making its service accessible to all users and shares learning about equalities and diversity issues• Develop effective processes for managing expectations and building service users' understanding of our powers
d. Ensure service providers implement report recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to support the development and implementation of systems to capture case knowledge and to track the implementation of recommendations by BUJs

Strategic objective 2: To support public service improvement in Scotland

By continuing to raise informed awareness of the role of the SPSO and to feed back and capitalise on the learning from our consideration of individual enquiries and complaints, for example, through thematic reports, and by working in partnership with public service deliverers, policy makers, scrutiny bodies and regulators to promote good administrative practice.

Key Priority 2: Share strategic lessons from our casework with service providers and appropriate scrutiny bodies; ensure service providers implement SPSO recommendations; and use communications tools effectively to promote understanding of the SPSO

a. Ensure strategic lessons from casework trends and findings are shared effectively with service providers and appropriate scrutiny and other bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to implement an engagement strategy that identifies and supports BUJs where SPSO finds a high degree of service delivery or complaints handling failings relative to other, similar BUJs
b. Continue to promote informed awareness of the purpose, role and activities of the SPSO <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to gather feedback from key stakeholders about their satisfaction with our service• Publish an Annual Report which informs and influences all stakeholders• Review partnership arrangements such as Memorandums of Understanding to ensure effectiveness• Use communications tools, especially IT, to improve understanding of the SPSO• Promote understanding of SPSO among councils and in Parliament to support them in communicating the role of the SPSO to their customers and constituents• Ensure staff awareness of SPSO's changing role, purpose and activities
c. Identify common equality issues (explicit and implicit) within complaints brought to our office and feed back learning from such complaints to all stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyse and publish information about equalities issues

Strategic objective 3: To improve complaints handling by public service providers

By using our expertise and resources to monitor, promote and facilitate the sharing of best practice and support service providers in improving their complaints handling.

Key Priority 3: Through the Complaints Standards Authority and training and outreach activities, build and coordinate sectoral complaints handling networks and facilitate the sharing of good practice in complaints handling.

a. Support public services to achieve best practice through building, coordinating and supporting networks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With key bodies in each sector build, coordinate and support networks of complaints handlers that will develop best practice, support complaints handling practitioners and provide a forum for complaints benchmarking, including through the Valuing Complaints website online community forum for complaints handlers.
b. Promote good complaints handling by public service providers through the sharing of good practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and promote good practice in complaints handling and share that knowledge through the CSA, training and outreach activities, and on the Valuing Complaints website• Promote and further develop the Valuing Complaints website as a centre of best practice in complaints handling
c. Promote good complaints handling by public service providers by developing and delivering training in complaints handling
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through the training unit service develop and deliver high quality training in complaints handling for service providers, to develop their skills in frontline resolution and complaints investigation

Strategic objective 4: To simplify the design and operation of the complaints handling system in Scottish public services

By working in partnership with service providers, regulators and other key stakeholders to facilitate the development of and compliance with simplified, standardised and user-focussed Complaints Handling Procedures across the public sector as an integral part of the wider administrative justice system in Scotland.

Key Priority 4: Lead the simplification and standardisation of complaints handling by working in partnership to develop and implement model Complaints Handling Procedures (CHPs), based upon the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles and Guidance on a Model Complaints Handling Procedure

<p>a. Through the work of the Complaints Standards Authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote awareness amongst all BUJs of the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles and Guidance on a Model CHP• In all sectors work with key stakeholders to facilitate the development and implementation of a model CHP• With appropriate regulatory bodies, including Audit Scotland and the Scottish Housing Regulator, develop a consistent method for monitoring compliance and performance against the model CHPs within existing regulatory structures, including through self-assessment• Engage with the Care Inspectorate and other key stakeholders on issues raised by the integration of health and social care, including by promoting the SPSO model CHP guidance
<p>b. Engage effectively to ensure SPSO involvement in proposed legislative changes relating to complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactively engage with the Scottish Government on their review of social work complaints• Proactively engage with stakeholders on the implications of the proposed integration of health and social care to ensure clarity and simplification of complaints processes from user perspective

Strategic objective 5: To be an accountable, best value organisation

By making best use of our resources and demonstrating continuous improvement in our operational efficiency and supporting the professional development of our staff.

Key Priority 5: Deliver operational efficiency, effectiveness and accountability through clearly defined priorities, performance measures and resources that meet business needs, while supporting development of new areas of business

a. Manage resources effectively to meet business needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan and manage efficiency savings in line with SPCB and legislative requirements• Maintain productivity levels in terms of the average number of cases closed / individual complaints reviewer per month and the number of cases carried forward at year end• Support new business developments in line with statutory obligations• Continue to explore shared service opportunities for efficiency savings where appropriate
b. Improve operational efficiency through high quality business support services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure audit processes support continuous improvement and effective management of risks• Ensure realistic corporate plans and performance targets are produced on a timely basis and monitored closely• Ensure ICT requirements are met for future needs, eg, paperless office• Ensure quality and value for money for all services received
c. Promote improvements in organisational performance and staff professional development through implementation of the learning and development plan
d. Continue to meet obligations and statutory duties in relation to risk, governance, health and safety, FOI/DPA requirements, Equalities and diversity etc

Key Targets and Year-to-date Performance

2012 – 2013

Measuring performance and impact

The SPSO has developed a range of performance measures. These are reviewed and developed on an annual basis and focus on outcomes rather than activities. These measures map against the five strategic objectives and are there to support decision making at a strategic and operational level and provide a measure for monitoring business performance against targets.

Performance against these measures is reported on a quarterly basis to the Senior Management Team and to the Audit and Advisory Committee at least three times a year. A report is then published on an annual basis summarising key aspects of performance.

Strategic objectives and primary performance measures:

1 Providing a high quality, independent complaints handling service

- > Case time and age profile targets
- > Quality assurance measures
- > User satisfaction measures

2 Supporting public service improvement

- > Meeting our stated commitments to raise awareness of our role and publicise learning from complaints

3 Improving complaints handling practices

- > With key partners, build networks of complaints handlers for all sectors
- > Develop the Valuing Complaints website as a platform for sharing best practice
- > Effectiveness of training provision

4 Simplifying the design and operation of complaints handling systems

- > Publish model CHPs for all sectors and support bodies to implement them
- > Establish compliance and performance monitoring measures for all sectors

5 Being an accountable, best value organisation

- > Audit findings
- > Financial performance measures
- > Staff satisfaction
- > Workforce statistics
- > ICT performance information
- > Environmental impact assessments

Strategic Objectives	Business Plan Objectives	Measures	Targets	Year to Date				Year-end
				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
1. To provide a high quality, independent complaint handling service	a. Improve case handling times	Case time and age profile targets	KPI 1 Advice & Early Resolution - 95% of complaints at stage 1 and 2 are closed or progressed in 10 working days or less	97%	97%	98%		
			KPI 2 Early Resolution - 95% of complaints at Stage 3 are closed or progressed in 50 working days or less	69%	68%	74%		
			KPI 3 Investigation 1 - 85% of complaints at stage 4 are closed in 130 days	64%	56%	52%		
			KPI 4 Investigations - 95% of complaints at stages 4 & 5 are closed no later than 260 days	98%	98%	95%		
	b. Improve quality of casework	Measure for QA, review of decisions and service delivery	QA: 95% cases each quarter achieve acceptability (decision correct)	Q4	Q1	Q2		
			Reviews: less than 5% decision changed	1%	0.8%	0.01%		
			Service: less than 1% of total complaints received upheld	0.4%	0.5%	0.7%		
	c. Deliver an accessible, high quality service to all service users	Complainant satisfaction measure	Improvement on qualitative baseline measure					
2. Support public service improvement in Scotland	d. Ensure Service Providers implement report recommendations	Recommendations implemented	<i>Internal measure only:</i> 95% of recommendations implemented by the published target date	82%	93%	90%		
	a. Ensure strategic lessons from casework trends and findings are shared effectively with service providers and appropriate scrutiny and other bodies	Number of issue-based reports published	Two issue-based reports					
	b. Continue to promote informed awareness of the purpose, role and activities of the SPSO	Stakeholder awareness measure	BUJ survey shows improvement when compared with previous survey		Move to Q4			
	c. Identify common equality issues (explicit and implicit) within complaints brought to our office and feed back learning from such complaints to all stakeholders	Communication of equalities based casework	Annual report of findings					

Strategic Objectives	Business Plan Objectives	Measures	Targets	Year to Date				Year-end
				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
3. To improve complaint handling practice by public service providers	a. Build and coordinate networks	Number of networks established	Sectoral networks established and up and running in three sectors – Local government, Housing and Health					
		VC website expanded and developed to help co-ordinate / provide platform of support for networks	Online community forum established					
			Increasing levels of forum sign-up and blog contribution					
			Monthly SPSO contributions to forum and minimum four guest bloggers					
	b. Facilitate sharing of good practice	Mechanisms established to Identify good practice	Mechanisms established					
		Volume of CSA good practice guidance documents	Three guidance documents issued					
		Increased volume of BUJ traffic on VC website	Increased volume of hits on VC website					
	c. developing and delivering training in complaints handling	e-learning modules developed and available through SPSO online training centre	Local authorities Housing FE and HE NHS (in conjunction with NES)					
		Training courses developed and delivered	30 training courses developed and delivered.					
4. To simplify the design and operation of the complaint-handling system in Scottish public services	a. Through the work of the Complaints Standards Authority develop and introduce model Complaints Handling Procedures (CHPs) and develop arrangements for monitoring compliance and performance within existing regulatory structures, including self-assessment	Model CHPs developed, published and implemented	CHPs published for all sectors					
		Compliance with local authority and RSL CHPs monitored and reported through Audit Scotland and SHR	100%					
		Monitoring mechanisms for other sectors agreed	100%					
		Performance monitoring mechanisms agreed.	Mechanisms and indicators for local authority and RSL sectors developed and approved. Arrangements for other sectors agreed.					

	b. Engage effectively to ensure SPSO involvement in proposed legislative changes relating to complaints	Proactively engage with the Scottish Government on their review of social work complaints	100%					
		Proactively engage with stakeholders on the implications of the proposed integration of health and social care to ensure clarity and simplification of complaints processes from user perspective	100%					
5. To be an accountable, best value organisation	a. Manage resources effectively to meet business needs	Financial performance measures	Actual spend within 5% of budget forecast					
		Number of cases closed / quarter	< 745 in Advice < 270 in ER <132 in Investigations (<1045)	666 218 137 (1021)	677 236 148 (1061)	656 278 150 (1084)		
		Number of cases carried forward	<500 at year end					
	b. Improve operational efficiency through high quality business support services	Audit findings	85% Audit report recommendations implemented in time					
		Payment performance	95%					
		ICT performance information	Systems 99% availability					
	c. Promote improvements in organisational performance and staff professional development through implementation of the learning and development plan	Staff satisfaction	Maintain Investors in People status					
		Workforce statistics	Staff absence: - <4% lost days (not including long-term sickness) 2009-10 = Av. 5 days per employee 2010-11 = Av 3.6 days per employee 2011-12 = Av 5.9 days per employee					
	d. Continue to meet obligations and statutory duties in relation to risk, governance, health and safety, FOI/DPA requirements etc.	H&S Regulations	External audit of H&S plan satisfactory					
		Environmental impact assessments	Carbon emissions <85.3 CO2 Annual primary energy supply (2009 baseline) 2010-11 = 84.39 2011-12 = 63.20					

Annex 2: Selection of unsolicited anonymised comments to SPSO complaints reviewers.

“Everyone I have dealt with has been efficient, sympathetic and professional, yourself most of all. I appreciate your willingness as a service to take on further investigation and the additional time this will take.”

“You as an organisation should get a star for customer service as unlike some public bodies there is no automated system and you get straight through to a person. I like the fact that you are human and don’t read from a script.”

“I just wanted to thank you for all your hard work over the last eight months. I was very nervous about going to the SPSO but you have made it a very positive experience for me. You and your colleagues have been very thorough in your investigations and you were always at the end of the phone if I had to speak to you. I am very happy with the final report, so once again thank you.”

“I just wanted to send you an email to thank you for all your efforts in dealing with our complaint to the council. The council have agreed to the amount you recommended surprisingly quickly. Thanks again for all your time and effort it is very much appreciated.”

“Thank you very much to everybody who had been involved in my case; I am so pleased that someone had listened to me and believed me about my husband’s care.”

“Thank you for your letter. I wish to thank you for your efforts in dealing with my complaint and appreciate your diligence. I can confirm that I have now received an acceptable response from the Council.”

“Thank you for such a comprehensive explanation of your decisions. The detail you provided has helped me to view the situation with a bit more perspective. I have written to the Board to request a meeting to discuss whether we can work together to secure the best interests of my father. Thank you for all your work in this matter and I hope you do not feel that I have wasted your time.”

“Thank you for your letter outlining the points of my complaint about the Board, I am emailing you to thank you for your kind and sensitive tone of your letter. You noticed that it is around the date of the first anniversary of my dad’s death and I really appreciate your kindness in doing so.”

“You have been enormously helpful and although [aggrieved] is disappointed (as I am) we understand why it would be unwise to pursue things through your Department. In asking you to now close this complaint we would both like to thank you, once again, for all the time and effort you have so generously given to this matter.”

“A few months ago I had a complaint about the revenue unit of the council over a council tax refund. A member of your staff kindly gave me the address and telephone number of the council’s complaint office – I wrote to them, it took a week or two but I received my refund in full and the matter has been resolved, so I thought I would write and thank you for your office’s help. Thanks again.”

“May I thank your organisation and your complaints reviewer, who was very concise and prompt in keeping us up to speed about events.”

“I am writing to thank you for considering my complaint and investigating it so thoroughly. I am profoundly grateful, as is my husband, for your time, expertise, and effort in response to my complaint. This outcome, from my perspective, will help to restore some of the dignity that was lost over this period.”

“I am very happy that the main part of my case was upheld and that changes will be made to processes within XX health board so that others may benefit. I am glad to now draw a line under this event. It is a pity so many complaints have to reach you.”