



A Complaints Handling Procedure for Integration Authorities in Scotland

Issued: March 2017

The Integration Authorities in Scotland template Complaints Handling Procedure

Foreword

[This is a suggested foreword for augmentation and endorsement by the integration authority's Chair or Chief Officer. You may, however, want to write an alternative foreword presenting the complaints handling procedure's key aims, benefits and requirements.]

[Our complaints handling procedure reflects our commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.

The procedure introduces a standardised approach to handling complaints across integration authorities, which complies with the SPSO's guidance on a model complaints handling procedure. This procedure aims to help us 'get it right first time'. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution.

Complaints give us valuable information we can use in terms of how we fulfil our responsibilities. Our complaints handling procedure will enable us to address dissatisfaction and may also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. Handled well, complaints can give customers a form of redress when things go wrong, and can also help us continuously improve.

Resolving complaints early saves money and creates better customer relations. Sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery as possible means we can deal with them locally and quickly, so they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure. Complaints that we do not resolve swiftly can greatly add to our workload.

It will help us keep the public at the heart of the process, while enabling us to better understand how to improve how we do our work by learning from complaints.]

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How to use this template Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP)

This template Complaints Handling Procedure has been approved by the SPSO to provide a helpful model for Integration Joint Boards in preparing their Complaints Handling Procedure. Any finalised CHP provided to the Complaints Standards Authority will be checked for compliance against the Scottish Government Model CHP, which was used to develop this template.

This document explains how Integration Authorities will handle complaints. The authority will also need to have another document that provides information for customers on the complaints procedure. This can be the same information that is already provided in relation to other complaints about the HSCP's services. Together, these form our complaints handling procedure.

It contains references and links to more details on parts of the procedure, such as how to record complaints, and the criteria for signing off and agreeing time extensions. These explain how to process, manage and reach decisions on different types of complaints. Any text that is in italics may be amended or replaced with the organisation's own text as appropriate. The use of "we" refers to the organisation, not the SPSO.

This template CHP has been developed from the SPSO's Model CHP for the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and Associated Public Authorities in Scotland. Further details of this model, along with a Guide to Implementation, can be found on the Valuing Complaints website.

When using this document, please also refer to the 'SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles' and best practice guidance on complaints handling from the Complaints Standards Authority at the SPSO.

<http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk>

What is a complaint?

[*The organisation's*] definition of a complaint is:

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about [*the organisation's*] action or lack of action, or about the standard of service [*the organisation*] has provided in fulfilling its responsibilities as set out in the Integration Scheme'.

[The organisation may choose to provide information here to explain what is meant by the Integration Scheme.]

Issues that are not covered by this definition are likely to be covered by our other CHPs, relating to either our health or social work services.

A complaint may relate to dissatisfaction with:

- [*the organisation's*] policies
- [*the organisation's*] decisions
- the administrative or decision-making processes followed by [*the organisation*] in coming to a decision

This list does not cover everything.

A complaint is **not**:

- a first time request made to [*the organisation*]
- a request for compensation only
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal
- disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal exists
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

We will not treat these issues as complaints, but will instead direct the customer raising them to use the appropriate procedures.

Handling anonymous complaints

We value all complaints. This means we treat all complaints including anonymous complaints seriously and will take action to consider them further, wherever this is appropriate. Generally, we will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take further action, we may decide not to pursue it further. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior manager.

If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, it will be considered by a senior officer immediately.

If we pursue an anonymous complaint further, we will record the issues as an anonymous complaint on the complaints system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

What if the customer does not want to complain?

If a customer has expressed dissatisfaction in line with our definition of a complaint but does not want to complain, tell them that we do consider all expressions of dissatisfaction, and that complaints offer us the opportunity to improve services where things have gone wrong. Encourage them to submit their complaint and allow us to deal with it through the CHP. This will ensure that they are updated on the action taken and receive a response to their complaint.

If, however, the customer insists they do not wish to complain, we will record the issue as an anonymous complaint. This will ensure that their details are not recorded on the complaints database and that they receive no further contact about the matter. It will also help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data recorded and will still allow us to fully consider the matter and take corrective action where appropriate.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who is affected by the decisions made by [the organisation] can make a complaint. This is not restricted to people who receive services through [the organisation] and their relatives or representatives. Sometimes a customer may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. We will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.

Complaints involving the Health & Social Care Partnership or more than one organisation

A complaint may relate to a decision that has been made by the IJB, as well as a service or activity provided by the HSCP. Initially, these complaints should all be handled in the same way. They must be logged as a complaint, and the content of the complaint must be considered, to identify which services are involved, which parts of the complaint we can respond to and which parts are appropriate for the HSCP to respond to. A decision must be taken as to who will be contributing and investigating each element of the complaint, and that all parties are clear about this decision. The final response must be a joint response, taking into account the input of all those involved.

Where a complaint relates to a decision made jointly by the IJB and the Health Board or Local Authority, the elements relating to the IJB should be handled through this CHP. Where possible, working together with relevant colleagues, a single response addressing all of the points raised should be issued.

Should a member of staff who represents the HSCP receive a complaint in relation to the IJB, and they have the relevant and appropriate information to resolve it, they should attempt to do so. If the staff member feels unable to offer a response, the complaint should be passed to the IJB team as early as possible for them to resolve.

If a customer complains to *[the organisation]* about services of another agency or public service provider, but *[the organisation]* has no involvement in the issue, they will be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly.

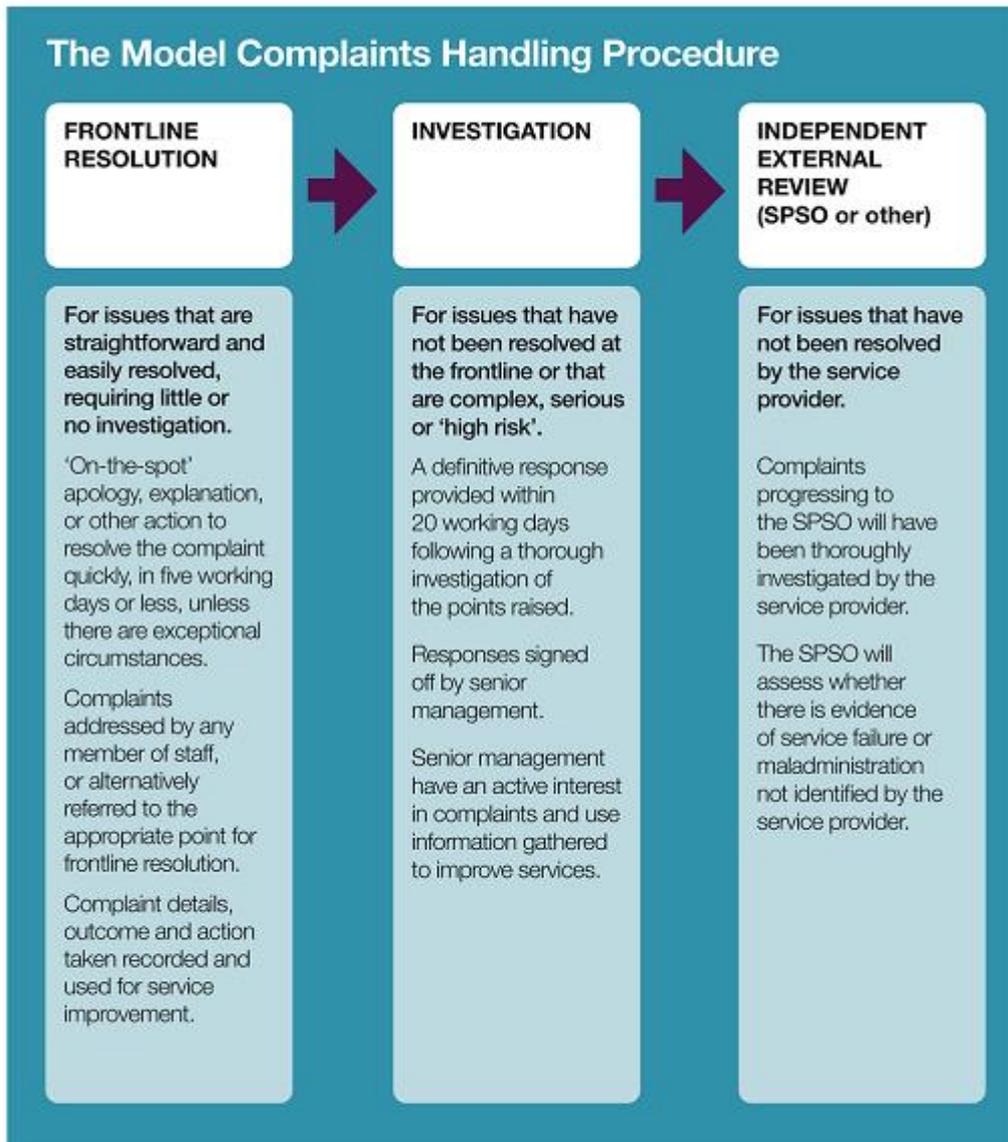
If we need to make enquiries to an outside agency in relation to a complaint we will always take account of data protection legislation and SPSO guidance on handling our customer's personal information. The Information Commissioner has detailed guidance on data sharing and has issued a data sharing code of practice.

The complaints handling process

The CHP aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints early and locally by capable, well-trained staff.

Our complaints process provides two opportunities to resolve complaints internally:

- **frontline resolution**, and
- **investigation**.



For clarity, the term 'frontline resolution' refers to the first stage of the complaints process. It does not reflect any job description within *[the organisation]* but means seeking to resolve complaints at the initial point of contact where possible.

Stage one: frontline resolution

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage; if the member of staff receiving the complaint is not able to provide a response, then it should be referred on to a more appropriate member of staff.

The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity. This may mean a face-to-face discussion.

Whoever responds to the complaint, it may be settled by providing an on-the-spot apology where appropriate, or explaining why the issue occurred and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again. They may also explain that, as an organisation that values complaints, we may use the information given when we review policies and processes in the future.

A customer can make a complaint in writing, in person, by telephone, by email or online, or by having someone complain on their behalf. Frontline resolution will always be considered, regardless of how the complaint has been received.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to how they receive complaints given the organisational structure in place. This can be inserted here or included in an annex to this document.]

What we will do when we receive a complaint

- 1 On receiving a complaint, we will first decide whether the issue can indeed be defined as a complaint. The customer may express dissatisfaction about more than one issue. This may mean we treat one element as a complaint, while directing them to pursue another element through an alternative route.
- 2 If we have received and identified a complaint, we will record the details on our complaints system.
- 3 Next, we will decide whether or not the complaint is suitable for frontline resolution. Some complaints will need to be fully investigated before we can give the complainant a suitable response. A senior officer will escalate these complaints immediately to the investigation stage.
- 4 Where we consider frontline resolution to be appropriate, we will consider four key questions:
 - What exactly is the complaint (or complaints)?
 - What does the complainant want to achieve by complaining?
 - Can I achieve this, or explain why not?
 - If I cannot resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

What exactly is the complaint (or complaints)?

It is important to be clear about exactly what the customer is complaining about. Staff may need to ask the supplementary questions to get a full picture.

What does the complainant want to achieve by complaining?

At the outset, staff will seek to clarify the outcome the complainant wants. Of course, they may not be clear about this, so there may be a need to probe further to find out what they expect and whether they can be satisfied.

Can I achieve this, or explain why not?

If staff can achieve the expected outcome by providing an on-the-spot apology or explain why they cannot achieve it, they will do so. If they consider an apology is suitable, they may wish to follow the SPSO's guidance on the subject, which can be found on the SPSO website.

The customer may expect more than we can provide. If their expectations appear to exceed what the organisation can reasonably provide, the officer will tell them as soon as possible in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes.

Decisions at this stage may be conveyed face to face or on the telephone or via e-mail. In those instances, you are not required to write to the customer as well, although you may choose to do so. A full and accurate record of the decision reached must be kept, including the information provided to the customer..

If I can't resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

If the complaint raises issues which you cannot respond to in full because, for example, it relates to an issue or area of service you are unfamiliar with, pass details of the complaint to more senior staff who will try to resolve it.

Timelines

Frontline resolution must be completed within **five working days** of *[the organisation]* receiving the complaint, although in practice we would often expect to resolve the complaint much sooner.

Staff may need to get more information or seek advice to resolve the complaint at this stage. However, they will respond to the complainant within five working days, either resolving the matter or explaining that *[the organisation]* will investigate their complaint.

Extension to the timeline

In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, senior management may agree an extension of no more than five working days with the complainant. This must only happen when an extension will make it more likely that the complaint will be resolved at the frontline resolution stage.

If, however, the issues are so complex that they cannot be resolved in five days, it will be appropriate to escalate the complaint straight to the investigation stage.

If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, a senior manager can still decide upon an extension. In those circumstances, they will then tell the complainant about the delay and explain the reason for the decision to grant the extension.

Such extensions will not be the norm, though, and the timeline at the frontline resolution stage will be extended only rarely. All attempts to resolve the complaint at this stage will take no longer than **ten working days** from the date [the organisation] received the complaint.

The proportion of complaints that exceed the five-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics will be presented to [the organisation] on a quarterly basis.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to extensions to the five-day timeline. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Appendix 1 provides further information on timelines.

Closing the complaint at the frontline resolution stage

When staff have informed the customer of the outcome, they are not obliged to write to the customer, although they may choose to do so. The response to the complaint must address all areas that we are responsible for and must explain the reasons for our decision. Staff will keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached. The complaint will then be closed and the complaints system updated accordingly. The complaints resolved at the frontline stage will be reported to the [the organisation] on a quarterly basis.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples about when to provide written confirmation of the decision at the frontline stage of the procedure. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

When to escalate to the investigation stage

[the Organisation] will escalate a complaint to the investigation stage when:

- frontline resolution has been attempted but the customer remains dissatisfied and requests an investigation. This may happen immediately when the decision at the frontline stage is communicated, or some time later
- the customer refuses to take part in frontline resolution
- the issues raised are complex and require detailed investigation
- the complaint relates to serious, high-risk or high-profile issues.

When a previously closed complaint is escalated from the frontline resolution stage, the complaint should be reopened on the complaints system.

We will take particular care to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high risk or high profile. The SPSO defines potential high-risk or high-profile complaints as those that may:

- involve a death or terminal illness
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in providing, or repeated failures to provide, a service
- generate significant and ongoing press interest
- pose a serious risk to an organisation's operations

- present issues of a highly sensitive nature, for example concerning:
 - a particularly vulnerable person
 - child protection.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to high-risk/high-profile complaints. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Stage two: investigation

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at that stage. Complaints handled at the investigation stage of the complaints handling procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination before we can state our position. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing immediate investigation.

An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the complainant a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our final position.

What we will do when we receive a complaint for investigation

It is important to be clear from the start of the investigation stage exactly what is being investigated, and to ensure that all involved – including the customer - understand the investigation's scope. It may be helpful for an investigating officer to discuss and confirm these points with the customer at the outset, to establish why they are dissatisfied and whether the outcome they are looking for sounds realistic.

In discussing the complaint with the customer, the investigating officer will consider three key questions:

1. What specifically is the complaint or complaints?
2. What does the complainant want to achieve by complaining?
3. Are the complainant's expectations realistic and achievable?

It may be that the customer expects more than we can provide. If so, our staff will make this clear to them as soon as possible.

Where possible we will also clarify what additional information we will need to investigate the complaint. The customer may need to provide more evidence to help us reach a decision.

Details of the complaint must be recorded on the system for recording complaints. Where appropriate, this will be done as a continuation of frontline resolution. The details must be updated when the investigation ends.

If the investigation stage follows attempted frontline resolution, staff will ensure that all relevant information will be passed to the officer responsible for the investigation, and record that they have done so.

Timelines

The following deadlines are appropriate to cases at the investigation stage:

- complaints must be acknowledged within **three working days**
- *[The organisation]* will provide a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but not later than **20 working days** from the time they received the complaint for investigation.

Extension to the timeline

Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline. For example, some complaints are so complex that they require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20-day limit. However, these would be the exception and we will always try to deliver a final response to a complaint within 20 working days.

If there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, senior management will set time limits on any extended investigation, as long as the complainant agrees. They will keep the customer updated on the reason for the delay and give them a revised timescale for completion. If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management can consider and confirm the extension. The reasons for an extension might include the following:

- Essential accounts or statements, crucial to establishing the circumstances of the case, are needed from staff, customers or others but they cannot help because of long-term sickness or leave.
- Further essential information cannot be obtained within normal timescales.
- Operations are disrupted by unforeseen or unavoidable operational circumstances, for example industrial action or severe weather conditions.
- The customer has agreed to mediation as a potential route for resolution.

These are only a few examples, and senior management will judge the matter in relation to each complaint. However, an extension would be the exception and we will always try to deliver a final response to the complaint within 20 working days.

As with complaints considered at the frontline stage, the proportion of complaints that exceed the 20-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics will be presented to *[the organisation]* on a quarterly basis.

Appendix 1 provides further information on timelines.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to extensions to the 20-day timeline. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Mediation

Some complex complaints, or complaints where customers and other interested parties have become entrenched in their position, may require a different approach to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, we may consider using services such as mediation or conciliation using

suitably trained and qualified mediators to try to resolve the matter and to reduce the risk of the complaint escalating further.

Mediation will help both parties to understand what has caused the complaint, and so is more likely to lead to mutually satisfactory solutions.

If *[the organisation]* and the customer agree to mediation, revised timescales will need to be agreed.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to mediation. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Closing the complaint at the investigation stage

We will inform the customer of the outcome of the investigation, in writing or by their preferred method of contact. This response to the complaint will address all areas that we are responsible for and explain the reasons for the decision. We will record the decision, and details of how it was communicated to the customer, on the system for recording complaints. The complaint will then be closed and the complaints system updated accordingly. The complaints resolved at the investigation stage will be reported to the *[the organisation]* on a quarterly basis.

In responding to the customer, we will make clear:

- their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint
- the time limit for doing so, and
- how to contact the SPSO.

Independent external review

Once the investigation stage has been completed, the customer has the right to approach the SPSO if they remain dissatisfied. The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of our complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failures and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way we have handled the complaint.

We will use the wording below to inform customers of their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint. The SPSO provides further information for organisations on the [Valuing Complaints](#) website. This includes details about how and when to signpost customers to the SPSO.

Information about the SPSO

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about the Scottish Government, NDPBs, agencies and other government sponsored organisations. If you remain dissatisfied with an organisation after its complaints process, you can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where you have not gone all the way through the organisation's complaints handling procedure
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain

- about, or
- that have been or are being considered in court.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

Freepost SPSO

Freephone: **0800 377 7330**

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

Website: www.spsso.org.uk

Governance of the Complaints Handling Procedure

Roles and responsibilities

[As per the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Act and as specified within the integration authority's Integration Scheme,] the Chief Officer's role is to provide a single senior point of overall strategic and operational advice to the integration authority. In line with this, overall responsibility and accountability for the management of complaints lies with the Chief Officer.

Our final position on a complaint must be signed off by an appropriate senior officer and we will confirm that this is our final response. This ensures that our senior management own and are accountable for the decision. It also reassures the customer that their concerns have been taken seriously.

*[The roles and responsibilities for each organisation will vary depending on size and organisational structure. The following paragraphs provide general examples of the roles and responsibilities that an IJB may consider appropriate in respect of complaints handling. Organisations are, however, free to manage the CHP in the most efficient and effective manner for their organisation. **The following paragraphs explaining roles and responsibilities should be amended to suit the particular considerations of individual organisations. However, there must remain a clear description of the roles and responsibilities in relation to complaints handling for each level of the IJB.***

Chief Officer:

The Chief Executive provides leadership and direction in ways that guide and enable us to perform effectively across all services. This includes ensuring that there is an effective complaints handling procedure, with a robust investigation process that demonstrates how we learn from the complaints

we receive. The Chief Officer may take a personal interest in all or some complaints, or may delegate responsibility for the CHP to appropriate members of the Senior Management Team of the Health & Social Care Partnership. Regular management reports assure the integration authority of the quality of complaints performance.

Members of the Senior Management Team:

Members of the Senior Management Team of the Health & Social Care Partnership may be responsible for:

- managing complaints and the way we learn from them
- overseeing the implementation of actions required as a result of a complaint
- investigating complaints
- deputising for the Chief Officer on occasion.

However, members of the Senior Management Team may decide to delegate some elements of complaints handling (such as investigations and the drafting of response letters) to other senior staff. Where this happens, senior management should retain ownership and accountability for the management and reporting of complaints. They may also be responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers, so they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete and their response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

Heads of service:

May be involved in the operational investigation and management of complaints handling. As senior officers they may be responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers, so they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete and their response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

Complaints investigator:

The complaints investigator is responsible and accountable for the management of the investigation. They may work in a service delivery team or as part of a centralised customer service team, and will be involved in the investigation and in co-ordinating all aspects of the response to the customer. This may include preparing a comprehensive written report, including details of any procedural changes in service delivery that could result in wider opportunities for learning across the organisation.

All staff:

A complaint may be made to any member of staff in [the organisation]. So all staff must be aware of this CHP and how to handle and record IJB complaints at the frontline stage. They should also be aware of who to refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to personally handle the matter. We encourage all staff to try to resolve complaints early, as close to the point of service delivery as possible, and quickly to prevent escalation.

[The organisation's] SPSO liaison officer:

Our SPSO liaison officer's role may include providing complaints information in an orderly, structured way within requested timescales, providing comments on factual accuracy on our behalf in response to SPSO reports, and confirming and verifying that recommendations have been implemented.]

Complaints about senior staff

Complaints about senior staff can be difficult to handle, as there may be a conflict of interest for the staff investigating the complaint. When serious complaints are raised against senior staff, it is particularly important that the investigation is conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation. We must ensure we have strong governance arrangements in place that set out clear procedures for handling such complaints, including the handling of complaints about the Chief Officer.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to the process for handling complaints about senior staff members. This can be inserted here or can be included in an annex to this document.]

Recording, reporting, learning and publicising

Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. One of the aims of the complaints handling procedure is to identify opportunities to improve services across *[the organisation]*. We must record all complaints in a systematic way so that we can use the complaints data for analysis and management reporting. By recording and using complaints information in this way, we can identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify opportunities for improvements.

Recording complaints

To collect suitable data it is essential to record all complaints in line with SPSO minimum requirements, as follows:

- the complainant's name and address
- the date the complaint was received
- the nature of the complaint
- how the complaint was received
- the date the complaint was closed at the frontline resolution stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was escalated to the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- action taken at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the outcome of the complaint at each stage
- the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken.

We have structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to how to record complaints in line with their system. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Reporting of complaints

Complaints details are analysed for trend information to ensure we identify procedural failures and take appropriate action. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform improvement actions.

We publish on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response. This demonstrates the improvements resulting from complaints and shows that complaints can influence our processes. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and will help the public to see that we value their complaints.

We must:

- publicise on a quarterly basis complaints outcomes, trends and actions taken
- where and when possible, use case studies and examples to demonstrate how complaints have led to improvements.

This information should be reported regularly (and at least quarterly) to the integration authority.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to how complaints information will be reported internally. This can be inserted here or can be included in an annex to this document.]

Learning from complaints

At the earliest opportunity after the closure of the complaint, officers involved in handling the complaint will make sure that the customer and relevant staff in the integration authority understand the findings of the investigation and any recommendations made.

Senior management will review the information gathered from complaints regularly and consider whether processes could be improved or internal policies and procedures updated.

As a minimum, we must:

- use complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints
- take action to reduce the risk of recurrence
- record the details of corrective action in the complaints file, and
- systematically review complaints performance reports to improve processes.

Where we have identified the need for improvement:

- the action needed to improve services must be agreed by the integration authority
- senior management will designate the 'owner' of the issue, with responsibility for ensuring the action is taken
- a target date must be set for the action to be taken
- the designated individual must follow up to ensure that the action is taken within the agreed timescale
- where appropriate, performance should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved
- we must ensure that the integration authority learns from complaints.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to how complaints information will be used to learn from complaints. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Publicising complaints performance information

We also report on our performance in handling complaints annually in line with SPSO requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volumes and types of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

Maintaining confidentiality

Confidentiality is important in complaints handling. It includes maintaining the complainant's confidentiality and explaining to them the importance of confidentiality generally. We must always bear in mind legal requirements, for example, data protection legislation, as well as internal policies on confidentiality and the use of customer's information.

Managing unacceptable behaviour

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The circumstances leading to a complaint may result in the complainant acting in an unacceptable way. Customers who have a history of challenging or inappropriate behaviour, or have difficulty expressing themselves, may still have a legitimate grievance.

A customer's reasons for complaining may contribute to the way in which they present their complaint. Regardless of this, we must treat all complaints seriously and properly assess them. However, we also recognise that the actions of customers who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on time and resources or unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. We will, therefore, work with the Health Board and the Council to apply the relevant organisational policies and procedures to protect staff from unacceptable behaviour such as unreasonable persistence, threats or offensive behaviour. Where a decision is made to restrict access to a customer under the terms of an unacceptable actions policy, the relevant procedure will be followed to communicate that decision, notify the customer of a right of appeal, and review any decision to restrict contact with us. This will allow the customer to demonstrate a more reasonable approach later.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to their unacceptable actions policy. This can be inserted here or be included in an annex to this document.]

Supporting the complainant

All members of the community have the right to equal access to our complaints handling procedure. Customers who do not have English as a first language may need help with interpretation and translation services, and other customers may have specific needs that we will seek to address to ensure easy access to the complaints handling procedure.

We must always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality. This includes making reasonable adjustments to our processes to help the customer where appropriate.

Several support and advocacy groups are available to support individuals in pursuing a complaint and customers should be signposted to these as appropriate.

[The organisation may provide further guidance or examples in relation to arrangements to support the customer. This can be inserted here or can be included in an annex to this document.]

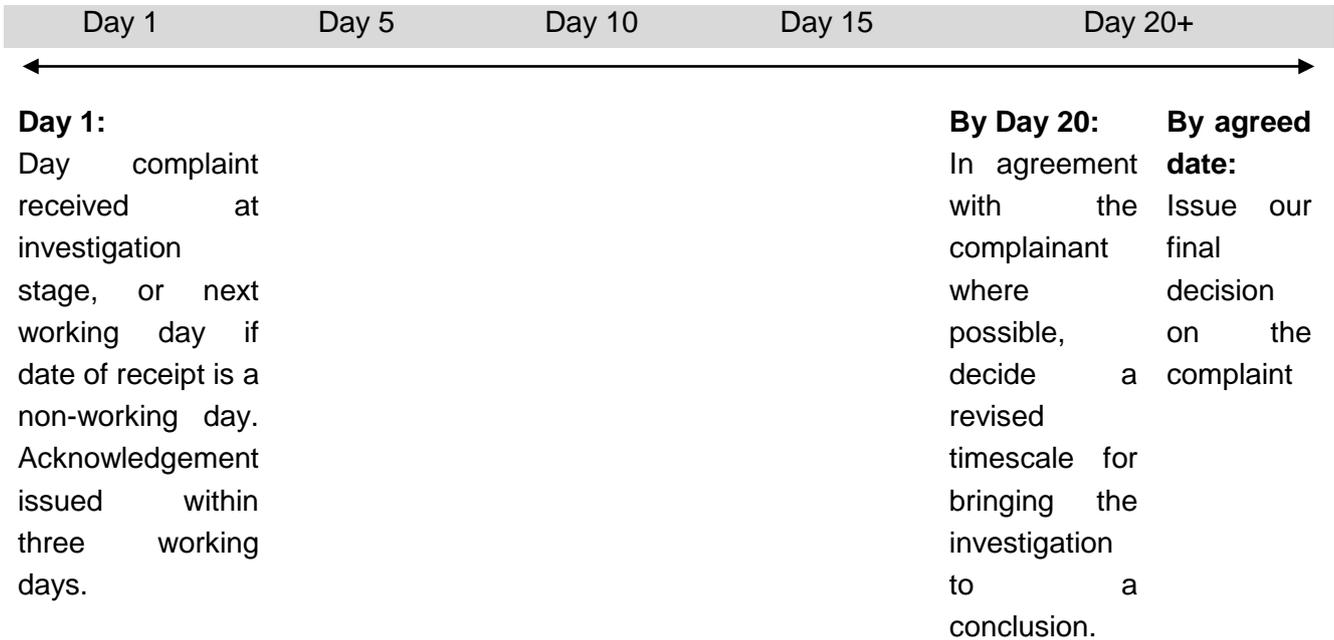
Time limit for making complaints

This complaints handling procedure sets a time limit of six months from when the customer first knew of the problem, within which time they may ask us to consider the complaint, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

We will apply this time limit with discretion. In decision making we will take account of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (Section 10(1)), which sets out the time limit within which a member of the public can normally ask the SPSO to consider complaints. The limit is one year from when the person first knew of the problem they are complaining about, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

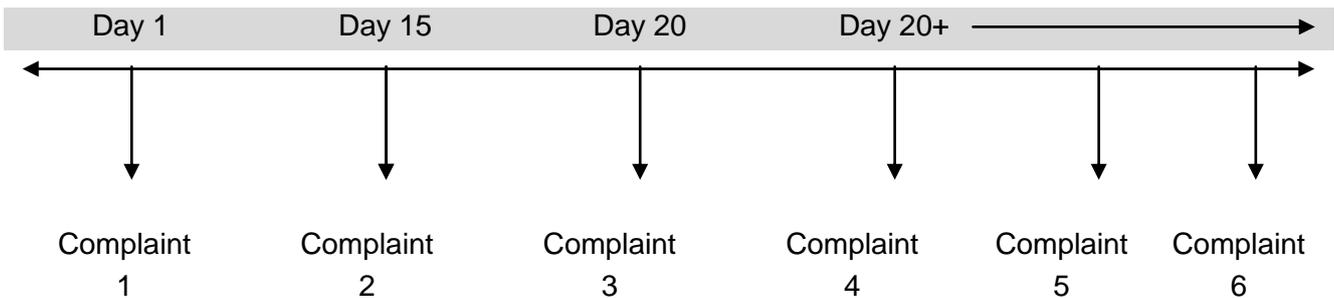
If it is clear that a decision not to investigate a complaint will lead to a request for external review of the matter, we may decide that this satisfies the special circumstances criteria. This will enable us to consider the complaint and try to resolve it.

Exceptionally you may need longer than the 20-day limit for a full response. If so, the Chief Officer will explain the reasons to the complainant, and agree with them a revised timescale.



Timeline examples

The following illustration provides examples of the point at which we conclude our consideration of a complaint. It is intended to show the different stages and times at which a complaint may be resolved.



The circumstances of each complaint are explained below:

Complaint 1

Complaint 1 is a straightforward issue that may be resolved by an on-the-spot explanation and, where appropriate, an apology. Such a complaint can be resolved on day 1.

Complaint 2

Complaint 2 is also a straightforward matter requiring little or no investigation. In this example, resolution is reached at day three of the frontline resolution stage.

Complaint 3

Complaint 3 refers to a complaint that we considered appropriate for frontline resolution. We did not resolve it in the required timeline of five working days. However, we authorised an extension on a clear and demonstrable expectation that the complaint would be satisfactorily resolved within a further five days. We resolved the complaint at the frontline resolution stage in a total of eight days.

Complaint 4

Complaint 4 was suitably complex or serious enough to pass to the investigation stage from the outset. We did not try frontline resolution; rather we investigated the case immediately. We issued a final decision to the complainant within the 20-day limit.

Complaint 5

We considered complaint 5 at the frontline resolution stage, where an extension of five days was authorised. At the end of the frontline stage the complainant was still dissatisfied. At their request, we conducted an investigation and issued our final response within 20 working days. Although the end-to-end timeline was 30 working days we still met the combined time targets for frontline resolution and investigation.

Complaint 6

Complaint 6 was considered at both the frontline resolution stage and the investigation stage. We did not complete the investigation within the 20-day limit, so we agreed a revised timescale with the customer for concluding the investigation beyond the 20-day limit.

Appendix 2 - The complaints handling procedure

