

# SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles

## An effective complaints handling procedure is:

**User-focused:** it puts the complainant at the heart of the process.

**Accessible:** it is appropriately and clearly communicated, easily understood and available to all.

**Simple and timely:** it has as few steps as necessary within an agreed and transparent timeframe.

**Thorough, proportionate and consistent:** it should provide quality outcomes in all complaints through robust but proportionate investigation and the use of clear quality standards.

**Objective, impartial and fair:** it should be objective, evidence-based and driven by the facts and established circumstances, not assumptions, and this should be clearly demonstrated.

### ...and should:

**Seek early resolution:** it aims to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, to the service user's satisfaction wherever possible and appropriate.

**Deliver improvement:** it is driven by the search for improvement, using analysis of outcomes to support service delivery and drive service quality improvements.

## User-focused

**An effective complaints handling procedure puts the complainant at the heart of the process.**

Service providers should recognise the different needs of individuals and be flexible and responsive to those needs where possible and appropriate.

Complainants should be listened to, respected and treated with dignity.

They should feel supported in bringing a complaint.

Confidentiality should be observed where appropriate.

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## Accessible

**An effective complaints handling procedure is appropriately and clearly communicated, easily understood and available to all.**

Complaints should be welcomed by informed and empowered staff.

A complaints procedure should be well publicised.

A complaints procedure should be easily understood without any specialist knowledge.

A complaints procedure should be designed with regard to the needs of minority and vulnerable groups. Where appropriate, service providers should make available material and support to help people access and use the procedure.

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## Simple and timely

**An effective complaints handling procedure has as few steps as necessary within an agreed and transparent timeframe.**

The process of dealing with complaints should be timely with timescales which are clear, published and adhered to.

Thoroughness of investigation should not be compromised by attempts to meet timescales and flexibility may be afforded for particularly complex cases. It is vital that, in cases where timescales cannot be met for good reason, complainants are kept informed of those reasons.

## Thorough, proportionate and consistent

**An effective complaints handling procedure should provide quality outcomes in all complaints through robust but proportionate investigation and the use of clear quality standards.**

There should be detailed quality standards for complaints handling, that are well publicised to both service users and staff along with a clear explanation of what action will be taken if these standards are not met.

The complaints handling procedure and quality standards should be regularly reviewed.

The method of investigating and resolving the complaint should be proportionate and appropriate to the circumstances of the case.

Investigations, outcomes and redress should be consistent from one complaint to another whilst being flexible in considering the needs of the individual complainant.

Conclusions should be based on the facts and circumstances established and this should be clearly demonstrated.

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## Objective, impartial and fair

**An effective complaints handling procedure should be objective, evidence-based and driven by the facts and established circumstances, not assumptions, and this should be clearly demonstrated.**

All relevant facts should be gathered and established in an impartial manner.

Staff involved in complaints handling should be impartial, independent and accountable. As far as possible they should not be involved in investigating where they have been the subject of the complaint or involved in its handling.

Complaints handlers should act with respect towards service users. A complainant should only be treated differently to other complainants if this is justified by the individual circumstances of the case or the individual actions or behaviour of the complainant. Service providers should have policies in place to deal with such actions or behaviour.

Fairness extends to complaints handling staff and the subject of any complaint.

## Seeks early resolution

**An effective complaints handling procedure aims to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, to the service user's satisfaction wherever possible and appropriate.**

Staff should be trained and empowered to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, starting with the first point of contact with service users.

The outcome the service user wants should be clarified at the outset and, where possible and appropriate, satisfied.

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## Delivers improvement

**An effective complaints handling procedure is driven by the search for improvement, using analysis of outcomes to support service delivery and drive service quality improvements.**

The complaints procedure should reflect and enhance the culture of good service delivery.

Complaint outcomes should be publicly available and should be used to demonstrate improvement and share best practice in service delivery.

Data from complaints should be used to measure performance, identify trends and highlight problems so that they can be solved before they have a chance to escalate, with the overall purpose of contributing to the continuous improvement of service delivery.

*Approved by the Scottish Parliament, January 2011*

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**SPSO information [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)**

**SPSO complaints standards [www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk](http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk)**