



The Local Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure

As adapted for Grampian Assessor & ERO

Part 4: Governance

<i>Version</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Local Authority MCHP published on SPSO website	March 2012
2	Combined and revised version published on SPSO website	January 2020
3.	Adapted and approved by Grampian Valuation Joint Board	

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Roles and responsibilities

1. All staff will be aware of:
 - the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP)
 - how to handle and record complaints at the frontline response stage
 - who they can refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to handle the matter
 - the need to try and resolve complaints early and as close to the point of service delivery as possible; and
 - their clear authority to attempt to resolve any complaints they may be called upon to deal with.
2. Training on this procedure will be part of the induction process for all new staff. Refresher training will be provided for current staff on a regular basis.
3. Senior management will ensure that:
 - The final position on a complaint investigation is signed off by an appropriate manager or officer in order to provide assurance that it is our definitive response and that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously
 - it maintains overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of complaints handling (including complaints about contracted services)
 - it has an active role in, and understanding of, the CHP (although not necessarily involved in the decision-making process of complaint handling)
 - mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way complaints handling information is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in our organisation; and
 - complaints information is used to improve services, and this is evident from regular publications.
4. **Assessor & ERO:** The Assessor & ERO provides leadership and direction in ways that guide and enable us to perform effectively across our 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 Assessor is our SPSO liaison officer and may take a personal interest in all or some complaints, or may delegate responsibility for the complaint handling procedure to Deputies.
5. The Assessor & ERO is also responsible for ensuring that there are governance and accountability arrangements in place in relation to complaints about contractors. This includes:
 - ensuring performance monitoring for complaints is a feature of the service/management agreements with contractors
 - setting clear objectives in relation to this complaints procedure and putting appropriate monitoring systems in place to provide us with an overview of how the contractor is meeting its objectives.

6. **Depute Assessors and EROs:** Deputes 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

However, Deputes may decide to delegate some elements of complaints handling (such as investigations and the drafting of response letters) to Assistant Assessors or the Principal Admin Officer. Where this happens, Deputes should retain ownership and accountability for the management and reporting of complaints. Where they are not responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete and the response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

7. **Assistant Assessors / Principal Admin Officer:** 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.

8. **All staff:** A complaint may be made to any member of staff in the organisation. So all staff must be aware of the complaints handling procedure and how to handle and record complaints at the frontline stage. They should also be aware of whom 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.

9. **Complaints investigator:** The complaints investigator is responsible and accountable for the management of the investigation. They will be involved in the investigation and in coordinating 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 and identifying wider opportunities for learning across the organisation.

10. **The human resources/training officer:** The HR or training officer is responsible for ensuring all new staff receive training on the CHP as part of the induction process, and that refresher training is provided for current staff on a regular basis.

11. **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.

Recording, reporting, learning from and publicising complaints

12. Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. One of the aims of the CHP is to identify opportunities to improve services across our organisation. By recording and analysing complaints data, we can identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify training opportunities and introduce service improvements.
13. We also have arrangements in place to ensure complaints about contractors are recorded, reported on and publicised in line with this CHP.

Recording complaints

14. It is important to record suitable data to enable us to fully investigate and respond to the complaint, as well as using our complaint information to track themes and trends. As a minimum, we should record:
 - the customer's name and contact details
 - the date the complaint was received
 - the nature of the complaint
 - the service the complaint refers to
 - staff member responsible for handling the complaint
 - action taken and outcome at frontline response stage
 - date the complaint was closed at the frontline response stage
 - date the investigation stage was initiated (if applicable)
 - action taken and outcome at investigation stage (if applicable)
 - date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (if applicable); and
 - the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken.
 - the outcome of the SPSO's investigation (where applicable).
15. If the customer does not want to provide any of this information, we will reassure them that it will be managed appropriately, and record what we can.
16. Individual complaint files will be stored with the Complaints Log and managed in line with our document retention policy.

Learning from complaints

17. We must have clear systems in place to act on issues identified in complaints. As a minimum, we must:
 - seek to identify the root cause of complaints
 - take action to reduce the risk of recurrence; and
 - systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery.

Quarterly review of the Complaints Log and outcomes will be carried out by the Management Team.

18. Learning may be identified from individual complaints (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not) and from analysis of complaints data.

- Where we have identified the need for service improvement in response to an individual complaint, we will take appropriate action. This may include; the action needed to improve services must be authorised by an appropriate manager
- an officer (or team) should be designated 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 in the service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved; and
- any learning points should be shared with relevant staff.

19. SPSO has guidance on **Learning from complaints**.

20. The Management Team will review the information reported on complaints regularly to ensure that any trends or wider issues which may not be obvious from individual complaints are quickly identified and addressed. Where we identify the need for service improvement, we will take appropriate action (as set out above). Where appropriate, performance in the service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved.

Reporting of complaints

21. We have a process for the internal reporting of complaints information, including analysis of complaints trends. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of where services need to improve.

22. We will report at least **quarterly** to senior management on:

- performance statistics, in line with the complaints performance indicators published by SPSO
- analysis of the trends and outcomes of complaints (this should include highlighting where there are areas where few or no complaints are received, which may indicate either good practice or that there are barriers to complaining in that area).

Publicising complaints information

23. We are a small organisation and the incidence of complaints is limited however where appropriate we will publish on a **quarterly** basis information on complaints outcomes and actions taken to improve services. Note: this does not require publication of complaints performance data or trends analysis on a quarterly basis, although some may choose to do so. The focus is on improving positive communication with customers on the value of complaining. This could take the form of case studies, examples of how complaints have helped improve services, or 'you said, we did' leaflets. Publication may be through newsletters, websites or other forums used to communicate with customers

24. This demonstrates the improvements resulting from complaints and shows that complaints can help to improve our services. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and will help to show our customers that we value their complaints.
25. We provide an **annual** complaints performance report for consideration by the Grampian Valuation Joint Board. The annual report is available via our website in line with SPSO requirements, and provide this to the SPSO on request. This summarises and builds on any quarterly reports we have produced about our services. It includes:
- performance statistics, in line with the complaints performance indicators published by the SPSO; and
 - complaint trends and the actions that have been or will be taken to improve services as a result.
26. These reports must be easily accessible to members of the public and available in alternative formats as requested.