



Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP)

<i>Version</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	CHP approved by Grampian Valuation Joint Board	26 August 2016
2	Updated CHP for approval of Grampian Valuation Joint Board	January 2021

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1. Introduction

The Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is an independent public official responsible for valuing non-domestic properties for rating, allocating dwellings to council tax bands and maintaining the Electoral Register.

The Assessor & ERO is appointed and funded by the Grampian Valuation Joint Board. The Board is a public body that exists to provide the local taxation assessment service to the three councils within the Grampian area (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray). By agreement with these councils, the Board is also responsible for the appointment and funding of the Electoral Registration Officer.

The Assessor & ERO has a small workforce distributed between offices in Aberdeen, Banff & Elgin. The Board and the Assessor & ERO are committed to providing a first class, effective and efficient service to the citizens of the North East of Scotland and appreciate that we can improve our services by considering feedback, both positive and negative from our service users.

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

The procedure has been developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) which promotes a standard approach to handling complaints across the public sector.

2. Grampian Assessor & ERO

The Grampian Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer is an independent statutory official appointed by the Grampian Valuation Joint Board to value non-domestic properties for rating purposes, allocate dwellings to council tax bands and provide an electoral registration service for the Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray council areas. These councils lie in the North East of Scotland and their collective area is known as Grampian. The local councils collect non-domestic rates and council tax and their Returning Officers are usually responsible for conducting any elections.

3. The Grampian Valuation Joint Board

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board is the statutory valuation authority established by the Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995. The Board comprises 15 members; Aberdeen City Council appoints six Members, Aberdeenshire Council appoints six Members and The Moray Council appoints three Members. The three councils fund the Board on a pro-rata basis.

The role of the valuation authority is to appoint the Assessor and deposes as necessary for the purposes of the Valuation Acts. The Assessor and any deposes must be chartered surveyors and the Valuation Acts place the duty to assess properties on the Assessor rather than the Board thus ensuring that the assessments are arrived at in an independent manner. Through local arrangements, the Board appointed the Assessor as Electoral Registration Officer to the three councils.

How to use this Complaints Handling Procedure

This document explains to staff how to handle complaints. Our complaints form provides information for customers on the complaints procedure.

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>

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

1. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

What is a complaint?

2. We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

What can I complain about?

3. You can complain about things like:
 - failure or refusal to provide a service
 - inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
 - dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
 - failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
 - failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
 - conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (**except** where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves); or
 - disagreement with a decision, (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).
4. Your complaint may involve more than one of our services or be about someone working on our behalf.

What can't I complain about?

5. There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:
 - a routine first-time request for a service
 - a first-time report of a fault such as an error on our website
 - a request for compensation only
 - issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process)
 - disagreement where a statutory procedure for challenging a decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established

- appeals process followed throughout the sector – such as council tax or non-domestic rating and the electoral register
- a disagreement where a statutory right of appeal, complaint or challenge exists – such as a disagreement, challenge or objection concerning an information notice or its related civil penalty, the valuation roll, the valuation list or the electoral register and its associated absent voter and overseas elector lists.
 - a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts
 - a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment
 - a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern)
 - an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
 - abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our Unacceptable Actions policy; or
 - a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (**except** where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).
6. If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

Who can complain?

7. Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent. Please also read the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

How do I complain?

8. You can complain
1. By visiting one of our offices when they are open
 2. by phone (01224 068400),
 3. by writing to Grampian Assessor & ERO, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GE
 4. by sending an email to assessor@grampian-vjb.gov.uk
9. It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly.
10. When complaining, please tell us:

- your full name and contact details
- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking.

Our contact details

Correspondence to Grampian Assessor & ERO, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GE

Phone 01224 068400

Email assessor@grampian-vjb.gov.uk

Web www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk

You can visit us at our offices at Woodhill House in Aberdeen, Mitchell Burnett House, Colleonard Raod, Banff or 234 High Street, Elgin. You should telephone or email in advance to make an appointment so that we can ensure that someone is available.

How long do I have to make a complaint?

11. Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about; or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

12. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

What happens when I have complained?

13. We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

Stage 1: Frontline response

14. We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

15. We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

16. If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to Stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2 either:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your Stage 1 response (if this is later).

17. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a Stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Stage 2: Investigation

18. Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at Stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at Stage 2 instead.

19. When using Stage 2:

- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for
- we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
- where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.

20. If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

21. After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO are an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

You can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through our complaints handling procedure

- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can do this online at www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form or call them on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4NS
(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

Their freepost address is:

FREEPOST SPSO

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk

22. There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

Getting help to make your complaint

23. We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.
24. You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance:

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Tel: 0131 510 9410 Website: <http://www.siaa.org.uk>

25. You can find out about advisers in your area through Citizens Advice Scotland:

Citizens Advice Scotland

Website: <http://www.cas.org.uk> or check your phone book for your local citizens advice bureau.

26. We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us.

Our contact details

27. Please contact us by the following means:

Correspondence to Grampian Assessor & ERO, Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GE

Phone 01224 068400

Email assessor@grampian-vjb.gov.uk

Web www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk

You can visit us at our offices at Woodhill House in Aberdeen, Mitchell Burnett House, Colleonard Road, Banff or 234 High Street, Elgin. You should telephone or email in advance to make an appointment so that we can ensure that someone is available.

We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as large print, audio and Braille).

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress..

Stage 1: Frontline response

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2.

Stage 2: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at stage 1. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they need investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**.

We will confirm the points of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve.

We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

There are some complaints that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

We will tell you how to do this when we send you our final decision.