

I complained. I'm still not happy. Can the SPSO help?

If you have already complained to a public service organisation and are still not happy, you can ask us if we can look at your complaint.

We look into complaints about most public services in Scotland. We look at complaints **after** you have gone through the organisation's complaints procedure to try to sort things out first.

This leaflet tells you about SPSO and what you can do if you have a complaint about a public service.

The SPSO service is free, independent and impartial

Advice line freephone **0800 377 7330**

If you need this information in another language or format (such as LARGE PRINT or Braille) please call us.

About us

The SPSO is the **final** stage for complaints about public services in Scotland.

We take complaints about:

- councils
- the National Health Service
- housing associations and co-operatives
- colleges and universities
- prisons
- water and sewerage providers
- the Scottish Government
- most Scottish authorities.

When to bring your complaint to SPSO

You can bring your complaint to us **after** you have gone through the organisation's complaints process. The organisation's final response should tell you that you can take your complaint to our office. If it does not, you should contact the organisation for advice on what to do next.



Unless there are special circumstances, we can't look at issues that happened more than a year ago.

Our role

The SPSO Act (2002) sets out our powers. It describes the types of complaints we can and cannot look at, and what we can and cannot do about them. It gives us the role of checking that an organisation has proper procedures in place and that they are followed.

We are not an appeal body for the decisions of organisations. We can check a decision is properly made, but we cannot change or overturn it. If we find that something's gone wrong, we can make recommendations to put things right. See page six for more information about our recommendations.

We can't look at complaints:

- about employment, personnel or most contractual matters
- about matters that have been taken to court or tribunal.

What to do if you want to complain

Tell the organisation that you are unhappy with that you want to complain. This will give them the chance to put things right. You can make your complaint in writing, in person, by phone, email or by asking someone else to do it for you.

If you complain in writing, it is helpful to follow the steps below:

- 1** Ask for the organisation's complaints leaflet or procedure.
- 2** Clearly mark your letter 'complaint.' There is an example complaint letter on the next page.
- 3** Make sure you write to the correct member of staff at the right address. Phone the organisation for advice if you're not sure who to write to.
- 4** Keep copies of your letters and the replies you get back. If someone from the public service responds to you by telephone, ask them to also put their response in writing.
- 5** Most organisations will try to resolve your complaint quickly and at the first point of contact.
- 6** If you are unhappy with the reply you get from the organisation, ask them to take it to the next stage of the complaints procedure. If you are not sure how to do this, call them to find out.
- 7** Follow all steps in the complaints leaflet or procedure.

Getting help

There are people who can help you make a complaint. You could ask a friend, a relative, a councillor, your MSP or an advocate. You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance or Citizens Advice Bureau.

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

Tel: 0131 260 5380 Fax: 0131 260 5381 Website: www.siaa.org.uk

Citizens Advice Scotland

Website: www.cas.org.uk

Or check your phone book for your local bureau.



Example of what to put in a complaint letter

	Your name
	Address
	Phone number
	Date
To: Name	
Job title	
Public service organisation	
Public service organisation's address	

Dear _____

COMPLAINT

I would like to complain about your service.

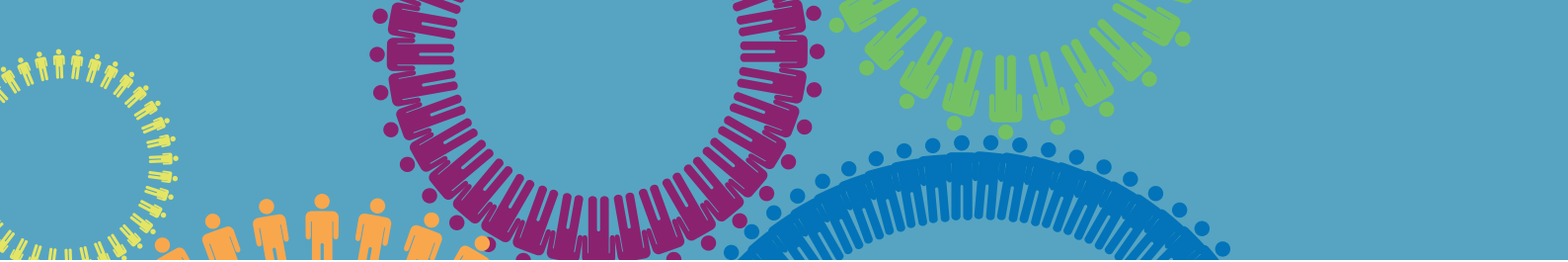
- Give details of what has gone wrong and tell them what you think would resolve the problem. Clearly explain what you would like to happen.
- Think about the outcome that you want. Are you looking for an apology, a change in policy, a service that should have been provided?
- You can ask the organisation to explain how they made their decision.
- Include information about what you have already done to try to sort things out. You may also find it helpful to include copies of previous letters, photos, statements etc.

Please contact me so that I know that you have received my complaint. I would also like to know when you will send me a full reply.

Yours sincerely,

Your name

Please keep a copy of your complaint letters.



Bringing a complaint to us

If you've not yet complained to the public service organisation please do not send us your complaint. We can only look at complaints after they have been through the right complaints process. We cannot look at complaints made anonymously.

The information below explains how to make your complaint to the SPSO.

If you are still unhappy after complaining

If you are still unhappy after the organisation sends you their final letter in response to your complaint, please tell us as soon as you can. We don't usually look at complaints if the matter you want to complain about happened more than a year ago. We also don't look at complaints that have been dealt with in court.

If you're not sure if we can look at your complaint please call our advice line
freephone: 0800 377 7330

Complaining to the SPSO

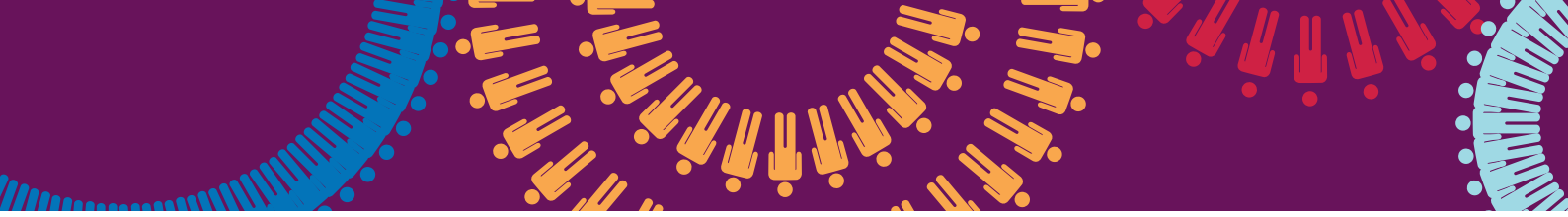
Once you have gone through the organisation's complaints process you can ask us if we can look at it. You should make your complaint to us in writing. It is best to use our SPSO complaints form to do this. Contact us for a form or you can make a complaint online: **www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form**

When returning your form please send copies of relevant paperwork, in particular the final response you received from the organisation. Tell us what went wrong, and what you would like to happen to put things right.

For information about what happens when we receive your complaint see **SPSO Information leaflet 2**. You can get copies of any of our leaflets by phoning us or going to our website: **www.spsso.org.uk/online-leaflets**

Contact us

We can help with any questions before you send your complaint to us – one of our complaints reviewers is always available. Please call us on **freephone 0800 377 7330**. You can also visit our office. You don't need to make an appointment. See the back page for more information about contacting us.



When we get your complaint

We will check that it has been through the right complaints process, that the organisation has had a chance to deal with the issue, and has given you their final response. There are some things we can't look at. If it is clear that we can't look at your complaint, we will tell you why and what you can do next. If it clear that we can't look at something, we will tell you why and what you can do next. If we can't help, we will try to find another organisation that can.

If your complaint is one that we can look at, we will try to deal with it as quickly as possible. We aim to keep your complaint private and only tell the people who need to know about it. We may publish the final decision that we make but we will not publish your name at any time.

When looking at your complaint we want to find out:

- what happened
- what should have happened
- why you are complaining
- why you feel it is still not resolved after complaining
- what would put things right for you.

Recommendations

If we find a problem, as well as putting things right for you we want to try to make sure the same thing doesn't happen to someone else. This is why we sometimes make recommendations after looking into a complaint. We publish reports to share the learning from complaints and help service providers improve.

Here are some examples of what we might ask the organisation to do to put things right for you:

- apologise to you
- take action to sort out a problem
- change how they do things
- make sure they deal with complaints properly.



Please note that there are some things that we cannot do, such as getting compensation for you or getting someone fired.



Our Service Standards

We aim to carry out our work in line with our Service Standards. You can read about these in our **Service Standards leaflet**, which also explains what to do if you are unhappy with our service.

Our decisions

Our information leaflet **Your Complaint, Our Decision** explains how we reach our casework decisions and the limited circumstances under which you may ask for a review of our decision. You should ask for a review or tell us about your concerns as soon as possible and **within three weeks** of the issue you are unhappy with.

Our leaflets

You can get fact sheets from our website about a range of issues including health, housing and council tax banding, see **www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets**. You can also get copies of any of our leaflets by phoning us on **0800 377 7330**.

Accessibility

We are committed to making our service easily accessible to all members of the public. If you want this information in another language or format, such as audio, large font, or Braille, contact us on freephone **0800 377 7330** or email us at **www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us**. For details about getting help with your complaint see page three of this leaflet.

For more information about our service, what we might be able to do, or to ask for a complaint form, call us.

Advice line freephone **0800 377 7330**

Contact us

For more information about our process and what we might be able to do to help, please call us on **0800 377 7330**.



SPSO
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

SPSO
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS

Opening hours: **Monday, Wednesday,**
Thursday, Friday 9am – 5pm
Tuesday 10am – 5pm



Advice line freephone **0800 377 7330**



Fax **0800 377 7331**



Website **www.spsso.org.uk**

Mobile site **<http://m.spsso.org.uk/>**

Online contact form **www.spsso.org.uk/contact-form**



You can fill in our complaints form online at:

www.spsso.org.uk/complain/form

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in other languages and formats
(such as **LARGE PRINT** or Braille).

