

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) form**A. General Information**

Name of proposal	Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) revision
Responsible department	Performance and Improvement

B. Aims of the proposal

What do you hope to achieve?	<p>As a public body we are required to follow the guidance and procedures set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). We first implemented the CHP in 2013. The SPSO revised the model complaints handling procedure (MCHP) in 2020 and we adopted this in the previous version of the CHP which was produced in March 2021.</p> <p>By adopting the MCHP we have aligned our complaints handling with other public sector organisations in Scotland. This means we can benchmark with other organisations and also makes sure the public receives a consistent service across the Scottish public sector.</p> <p>This EIA relates to revisions to the SSSC CHP, which will be effective from 1 April 2024.</p>
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	Recommended changes to the procedure will reduce the risk of incorrectly handling complaints submitted by MPs/MSPs and will ensure these are handled in compliance with SPSO guidelines.
Why is the proposal needed?	<p>Complaints to the SSSC are recorded on our internal Case Management System, Dynamics 365.</p> <p>The proposal is needed to allow a process change which will mean that the complaint record is held on the Dynamics 365 record of the MP/MSP, but is also linked to the D365 record of the registered worker. This will provide better customer service to complainants by ensuring complaints are handled appropriately where the complaint is made by an MP/MSP on behalf of the complainant.</p> <p>Currently, these complaints are handled in an inconsistent manner and there is a risk that such complaints are not handled at the correct stage of the complaints handling procedure. The recommended change will also reduce the risk of reputational damage to the SSSC of failure to handle complaints in compliance with SPSO guidelines.</p>
How will the proposal contribute to the SSSC's strategic objectives and/or priorities?	<p>Complaints are a valuable feedback tool which give us an opportunity to improve where customers identify issues with our standards of service. Complaints can be received from a wide range of customers and stakeholders and therefore potentially impact all areas of our work.</p> <p>Additionally, the adoption of the SPSO model CHP is a requirement for all Non-Departmental Government Bodies in Scotland. The SSSC already uses the existing model; this would simply maintain that under the new model.</p>

How will the proposal address the SSSC's Equality duties?	Overall positive impact on a number of groups as indicated below. No negative impact on any groups.
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C. Data and evidence gathering

What evidence has been used to come to the decisions contained in this EqIA?	Assessment of the current process and identification of complaints which have been handled inconsistently under the process which has identified a need for the process change. Assessment of how this change would impact our CHP as a whole, and how this would impact our customers.
Has the proposal been the subject of relevant engagement and/or consultation?	No. The model CHP was produced by the SPSO following extensive consultation with all Scottish public bodies including local authorities, NHS and NDPBs.
Has best judgement been used in place of data/research/evidence?	Yes. Based on guidance and resources from SPSO's Valuing Complaints website for public bodies: https://www.spsso.org.uk/the-model-complaints-handling-procedures
Have any gaps been found in the data?	No.

D. ASSESSING IMPACT AND IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE EQUALITY

Gender – positive impact

The Complaints Handling Procedure Guidance for Complainants includes a focus on supporting vulnerable customers regardless of their reasons for requiring support. The CHP for complainants includes a specific section with signposting to resources for those who need help or support to make their complaint. Customers can make a complaint in whichever way suits them best – we can accept complaints in a variety of formats including online, by phone and in person.

Ethnicity – positive impact

Customers can make a complaint in whichever way suits them best – we can accept complaints in a variety of formats including online, by phone and in person. We can also provide our guidance in different formats, such as large font or different language, upon request.

Disability – positive impact

We can accept complaints from the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser) where a complainant needs further support, is particularly vulnerable or is unable or unwilling to submit a complaint themselves.

Customers can make a complaint in whichever way suits them best – we can accept and respond to complaints in a variety of formats including online, by phone and in person. We can also provide our guidance in different formats, such as large font or different language, upon request. BSL users can also contact us via contactSCOTLAND-BSL, the online British Sign Language interpreting service. This information is signposted on our public website.

The complaints form also asks complainants how they would prefer to be contacted, and when responding to complaints, staff are advised via the CHP to respond in the preferred method wherever possible (although it may be necessary to follow up in writing to confirm complaint outcomes).

Sexual orientation – neutral impact

No impact identified.

Gender reassignment – neutral impact

We recognise there could be a potential negative impact on customers who are transitioning or have transitioned if complaints are not handled sensitively. However, we feel this has been mitigated by the inclusion of guidance in the CHP on how to sensitively handle complaints where the complainant may contact us under a different name or pronoun than is held on their record. We regularly analyse complaints received under the CHP, and through the life of the process there has been no evidence that anyone has been negatively impacted on the basis of gender reassignment.

Age – positive impact

We can accept complaints from the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser) where a complainant needs further support, is particularly vulnerable or is unable or unwilling to submit a complaint themselves.

Customers can make a complaint in whichever way suits them best – we can accept complaints in a variety of formats including online, by phone and in person. We can also provide our guidance in different formats, such as large font or different language, upon request.

Marital and Civil partnership – neutral impact

No impact identified.

Pregnancy and maternity – neutral impact

No impact identified.

Religion/belief/non-belief – neutral impact

No impact identified.

E. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUPS LIVING IN AN ISLAND COMMUNITY

This section considers the impact or effect of the proposal on island communities and whether this could be significantly different from its effect on other communities.

The proposal will have a neutral impact on Island Communities. There is no identified impact on this group.

F. CHILD RIGHTS AND WELLBEING

This section considers the impact of the proposal on children and young people, or specific groups of children and young people, in Scotland.

The proposal will have a positive impact on children and young people. We take a trauma informed approach to handling complaints. The CHP allows for complaints to be made by children and their carers or another representative such as an advocate complaining on their behalf in relation to the services provided.

G. HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES

This section considers the impact of the proposal on physical and mental health and wellbeing; this includes for example, participation, creativity and developing potential.

The CHP will have a positive impact. The CHP provides guidance for complainants on how to raise a concern about the service we provide. The CHP includes a focus on supporting vulnerable customers regardless of their reasons for requiring support. The CHP for complainants includes a specific section with signposting to resources for those who need help or support to make their complaint.

Customers can make a complaint in whichever way suits them best – we can accept complaints in a variety of formats including online, by phone and in person. We can also provide our guidance in different formats, such as large font or different language, upon request.

Additionally, the CHP follows standard practice and a consistent approach among all public bodies. A customer making a complaint to one public body should have the same experience and follow the same procedure as any other in Scotland.

H. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

This section is concerned with the impact of the proposal on pay and employment opportunities as well as valuing and supporting voluntary work.

The CHP will have a positive impact on removing disadvantage of inequality. The CHP is a standard procedure which is followed regardless of the status of a customer.

I. Care experienced children, young people and adults

This section concerns our duties to put Scotland's care experienced children, young people and adults at the heart of what we do.

The proposal will have a positive impact on care experienced children, young people and vulnerable adults. We are aware that anyone may have experienced trauma, particularly care experienced children and young people. We take a trauma informed approach to handling complaints, and do not want people to be retraumatised during the complaints process. The CHP allows for complaints to be made by children and their carers or another representative such as an advocate complaining on their behalf in relation to the services provided where a complainant needs further support, is particularly vulnerable or is unable or unwilling to submit a complaint themselves.

J. DECISION MAKING

Which of the following statements best describes the action that should be taken following the EqIA in relation to your proposal?

No major change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adjust the policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue with Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stop and remove the policy	<input type="checkbox"/>

Outline the reasons why you've selected this option

The revised CHP is similar to the previous policy. The CHP allows us to take a standardised approach to handing complaints across the SSSC, which complies with the SPSO's model complaints handling procedure.

Changes to process are solely to our internal procedures to ensure improved accuracy when handling complaints from third parties and to ensure continued compliance with SPSO guidelines. These changes will provide improved outcomes for complainants.

Additional improvements have also been made to add a clear statement on our website and on our complaints form about different methods of contacting us and how to request reasonable adjustments where required.

A visual flowchart of the complaints process has also been incorporated into the CHP.

K. MONITORING AND REVIEWING

How will the implementation of the policy/proposal be monitored? How and when will the impact of the proposal be reviewed? Outline the actions that will be taken, the timescale for these and who will be responsible for carrying out these actions.

Action	Timescale	Person Responsible
Ongoing review of complaints performance in line with SPSO guidelines.	The way SSSC records personal information such as protected characteristics will inform how possible it is in future to accurately record the impact of the CHP on those groups.	Review will be in line with SPSO guidance and managed in the first instance by the Change and Improvement Coordinator.

L. SIGN OFF

Name: Ian Stewart

Title: Head of Performance and Improvement

Date Approved: 11/12/2023