



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

Customer Complaints Monitoring Report

Annual Report 2015/16

This report covers the twelve month period from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. Appendix 1 contains the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's Performance Indicators.

What is a Complaint?

Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's definition of a complaint is:

'An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Joint Board's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Joint Board.'

A complaint may relate to:

- Failure to provide a service
- Failure to achieve standards or quality of service promised by the Joint Board
- Dissatisfaction with Joint Board policies or the way they are being applied or administered
- Disagreement with a decision where the customer cannot use another procedure (for example an appeal) to resolve the matter
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process.
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' inquiries or requests
- Unhelpful or insensitive treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff
- Malice, bias or unfair discrimination
- Inadequate or incomplete provision of information and/or advice
- Failure to take account of relevant matters in coming to a decision

This list does not cover everything.

A complaint is **not**:

- A routine first-time request for a service
- A request for compensation only
- An issue that is in court or has already been heard by a court or a tribunal
- A disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal exists, for example in relation to council tax or non-domestic rating appeals or Electoral Registration objections
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

Complaints Received During 2015/16

There were a total of 31 Complaints received during 2015/16 the vast majority of these related to Electoral Registration. The complaints relating to Electoral Registration fell into five topics. Reviews, Absent Voting, Open Register, Registration at Elections and Individual Electoral Registration implementation.

Reviews take place where the ERO has received information that someone may no longer be entitled to be registered at a particular address, these are required to maintain the accuracy and completeness of the register. There are a large number of Reviews carried out each year and they generated 2 complaints.

Absent voting covers both postal and proxy voting options, these can prove problematic in the lead up to an election as the rules regarding deadlines and who can apply are complex and difficult to understand, these generated a total of 9 complaints out of over 38,000 absent voters.

Elections accounted for 3 complaints, one of these related to a European Union Citizen who was not entitled to vote at the UK Parliamentary General Election due to the franchise rules. The two remaining complaints were due to more than one person with the same name being resident at the same address.

On the 19th September 2014 the largest change in living memory to Electoral Registration took place in Scotland with a move away from a household system to a system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). IER requires an individual to be responsible for their own registration and where their details do not match against records held by the Department of Work and Pensions, they are required by law to provide documentary evidence to prove who they are. This has resulted in 2 complaints. The process of registering under IER is prescribed and many of the forms must also contain prescribed wording, the wording of these forms was the subject of a further 3 complaints.

There were 3 complaints concerning letters being issued to electors that had recently passed away, apologies were issued and our processes were reviewed to prevent it happening.

There were two complaints relating our Council Tax function, both concerned the conduct of staff whilst on survey. Different members of staff were involved in each instance and in both cases the members of staff were reminded about ensuring that they act in an appropriate manner.

Resolution of Complaints

Most complaints were resolved at the frontline resolution stage. With the majority resolved on either the day of receipt or the day after. Five complaints were escalated to the investigation stage and these were all closed within 20 working days.

Referral to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman

One Complaint was referred to the SPSO, however as the complaint related to the Valuation Acts rather than administration the SPSO did not issue a determination.

Conclusion

2015/16 was a year of huge demands on our Electoral Registration Service, with the UK Parliamentary General Election, several Local Authority by-elections and the end of the transition to IER. Given these circumstances the rise in the number of complaints is disappointing but not unexpected, the wording on many of the prescribed forms and letters has caused difficulties throughout Scotland and has been fed back to the Electoral Commission.

R Nicol

27th July 2016

Appendix 1

SPSO Performance Indicators

Indicator 1: Complaints Received per 1000 of population.

0.1094

Indicator 2: Closed complaints.

The number of complaints closed at stage one as a percentage of all complaints : 84%

The number of complaints closed at stage two as a percentage of all complaints: 10%

The number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation as a percentage of all complaints: 6%

Indicator 3: Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld.

The number of complaints upheld at stage one as % of all complaints closed at stage one: 24%

The number of complaints not upheld at stage one as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage one: 73%

The number of complaints partially upheld at stage one as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage one: 4%

The number of complaints upheld at stage two as % of all complaints closed at stage two: 0%

The number of complaints not upheld at stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage two: 100%

The number of complaints partially upheld at stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed at stage two: 0%

The number of escalated complaints upheld at stage two as % of all escalated complaints closed at stage two: 33%

The number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage two as a percentage of all escalated complaints closed at stage two: 33%

The number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage two as a percentage of all escalated complaints closed at stage two: 33%

Indicator 4: Average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage one: 2.5 days

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage two: 9 days

Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation: 9 days

Indicator 5: Percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.

The number of complaints closed at stage one within 5 working days as % of total number of stage one complaints: 88%

The number of complaints closed at stage two within 20 working days as % of total number of stage one complaints: 100%

The number of escalated complaints within 20 working days as % of total number of stage one complaints: 100%

Indicator 6: Number of cases where an extension was authorised.

The number of complaints closed at stage one where extension was authorised, as % all complaints at stage one: 0%

The number of complaints closed at stage two where extension was authorised, as % all complaints at stage two: 0%

Indicator 7: Customer satisfaction

The statutory functions undertaken by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are covered by a number of different appeal mechanisms, such as Non Domestic Valuation and Council Tax Appeals and some aspects of Electoral Registration. Representations under these are quite rightly not recorded as complaints. The resolution of these appeals can be confrontational or adversarial, despite this our staff have scored consistently highly for their professionalism and knowledge in our Customer Satisfaction Survey. The relatively low number of customer complaints does not lend itself to an analysis solely of these.

Indicator 8: Learning from Complaints

Reports of the number and type of complaints received are submitted to the management team at each meeting, normally held every 4 to 6 weeks with any trends being identified. Our recording mechanism is being further refined to improve our learning outcomes and attempt to reduce the number of complaints where an extension in time is required.