



His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland Complaints Handling Procedure

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

The procedure complies with the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's (SPSO) guidance on a model complaints handling procedure. This procedure aims to help us 'get it right first time'. We want quick, simple and more streamlined complaints handling with early resolution by capable, well-trained staff.

Complaints give us valuable information we can use to improve customer satisfaction. Our complaints handling procedure will enable us to address a customer's dissatisfaction and may also prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. For our staff, complaints provide a first-hand account of the customer's views and experience, and can highlight problems we may otherwise miss. Handled well, complaints can give our customers a form of redress when things go wrong, and can also help us continuously improve our services.

The complaints handling procedure will help HMIPS do our job better, improve relationships with our customers and enhance public perception of HMIPS. It will enable us to better understand how to improve our services by learning from complaints.

Sara Snell
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

What is a complaint?

The HMIPS definition of a complaint is:

‘An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of HMIPS.

A complaint may relate to:

- failure to provide a service
- inadequate standard of service
- dissatisfaction with HMIPS policy
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff
- HMIPS failure to follow the appropriate administrative process

Your complaint may involve more than one service we provide in HMIPS or be about someone working on our behalf.

A complaint is not

- a routine first-time request
- a request for compensation only
- issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or tribunal
- an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision.

If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we can give information and advice to help you.

Handling anonymous complaints

We value all complaints. This means we treat all complaints including anonymous complaints seriously and will take action to consider them further, wherever this is appropriate. Generally, we will consider anonymous complaints if there is enough information in the complaint to enable us to make further enquiries. If, however, an anonymous complaint does not provide enough information to enable us to take further action, we may decide not to pursue it further. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior manager.

If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, we will refer it to a senior officer immediately.

If we pursue an anonymous complaint further, we will record the issues as an anonymous complaint on the complaints log. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by our services can make a complaint. Sometimes a customer may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. We accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.

The complaints handling process

Our complaints handling process aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints early and locally by capable, well trained staff.

Our complaints process provides two opportunities to resolve complaints internally:

- frontline resolution, and
- investigation.

Stage one - frontline resolution

Frontline resolution aims to quickly resolve straightforward complaints that require little or no investigation, at first point of contact. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage.

This could mean an on-the-spot apology where appropriate or an explanation of why the issue has occurred, and where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again and immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will respond to Stage 1 complaints within five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Responses will normally be face to face or by telephone, though sometimes we will need to put the decision in writing.

If we can't resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We might suggest that you take your complaint to Stage 2 and we will explain how to do this. You may choose to do this immediately or sometime after you receive our initial decision.

Stage two - investigation

A complaint will be escalated to Stage 2 when:

- you remain dissatisfied following Stage 1 and request an investigation
- you refuse to take part in frontline resolution
- the issues you raise are serious, high risk and high profile

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- where appropriate, discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for

- provide you with a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but no later than 20 working days from the time we received your complaint for investigation.

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

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about HMIPS. The SPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

If you remain dissatisfied when you have had a final response from HMIPS, you can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have not gone all the way through the HMIPS 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 or call them on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. Organisations who may be able to assist you are:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

The SPSO contact details are:

In person or by post

SPSO
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4NS

The freepost address is FREEPOST SPSO

(if you would like to visit in person you must make an appointment first)

Freephone: 0800 377 7330

Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us

Website: www.spsso.org.uk

How do I complain?

You can complain in writing, by email or via our website.

It is easier for HMIPS to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to us.

When complaining, tell us:

- your full name and address
- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong
- how you want us to resolve the matter.

How long do I have to make a complaint?

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, but no longer than 12 months after the event itself.

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.

Contact details

Charlene Ramsay
Business Manager
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
Room Y1.4
Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
Edinburgh
EH11 3XD

Charlene.ramsay@gov.scot

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint by e-mail 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 a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.



Stage 1: frontline resolution

We will always try to resolve 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 are complex or need detailed investigation.

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



The 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.

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