

ORC INTERNATIONAL

integrating
research^{and}
technology

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Complainant Satisfaction Survey 2007

Submitted to

The Executive Board, SPSO

Prepared by

Matthew Turner

ORC INTERNATIONAL

Angel Corner House
1 Islington High Street
London N1 9AH

www.orc.co.uk

Tel. 020 7675 1000

Fax. 020 7675 1900

E-mail matthew.turner@orc.co.uk

February 2008

Contents

	Page
1 Executive Summary	1
2 Introduction	3
3 Methodology	5
4 Profile	6
5 Awareness of the SPSO	9
6 Accessibility	10
7 Initial contact	16
8 Complaints not taken to the formal investigation stage	21
9 Complaints taken to the formal investigation stage	26
10 General Experience	35

1 Executive Summary

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) handles over 4,200 enquiries and complaints a year about public services in Scotland, including about councils, the National Health Service, housing associations, the Scottish Government and colleges and universities. Last year the SPSO engaged ORC International, the independent market research firm, to carry out its first research of complainants' perceptions. An eight-page questionnaire was sent to 2,056 complainants who had had their complaint determined during the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007. In total, 715 questionnaires were completed and returned, a response rate of approximately 35%.

1.1 Background

The SPSO came into operation in 2002 with the aim of creating a one-stop-shop for complaints about public bodies in Scotland. This research was aimed at exploring the experience of complainants, gauging their perceptions of the SPSO and the services it provides. The overall purpose of the survey was to secure feedback from complainants and to establish a benchmark with the aim of identifying user experience, levels of satisfaction as well as identifying strengths and potential areas of improvement for the service.

Changes were made to the way the SPSO complaints handled in October 2005, thus complaints received in 2006/7 will have been dealt with in a different manner to those received in 2004 and 2005.

1.2 Areas of Improvement

As noted above the SPSO changed its complaints handling in October 2005 and this seems to have had a positive impact upon complainants' perceptions of the service. Those first registering their complaint in 2007 tend to be more positive about the SPSO complaints process than those doing so in 2004/5.

Complainants first notifying the SPSO of their complaint in 2007 have by definition been engaged with the SPSO for less than a year, and a high proportion (71%) of those able to state that they first notified the SPSO in 2007 were also able to state that they had had a final outcome to their complaint; thus for approaching three quarters, a resolution had been reached in less than 12 months.

At the other end of the scale 46% of those first registering a complaint with the SPSO in 2004/5 did not receive an outcome until 2007. This lengthier process may be one of the factors contributing to increased satisfaction amongst 2007 complainants when compared with those first engaging with the Ombudsman in 2004/5.

Speed of dealing with a complaint therefore appears to be a key foundation of satisfaction for complainants.

1.3 Areas for Improvement

While the survey found areas of strength, areas of improvement were also highlighted by respondents. The key points for improvement are those aspects dealing with management of expectation and improved communications.

Expectation. Many respondents were unclear about the role of the ombudsman especially in terms of its powers. So for many the SPSO had not met their original expectations (62%). This finding highlights a clear need for the SPSO to communicate more effectively with complainants and the public generally concerning what the ombudsman's office can and cannot do on behalf of a respondent. Managing customer expectation, especially for ombudsman's' offices, is always important as powers are circumscribed by legislation and have them dealing with issues of administrative fairness not advocacy.

Frequency of Updates. Many respondents felt the SPSO should be more regular with updates concerning the progress of their case. When commenting on first contact with the Ombudsman, they are particularly likely to be more satisfied with the speed with which they received a reply, the level interest shown by the staff member, and the clarity of information provided.

Amongst complainants whose complaint was *not* taken to formal investigation stage, satisfaction with all aspects of the communication process is higher for 2007 complainants than for those registering in 2006 or before, particularly the speed of the SPSO's response and the level and clarity of information received within updates.

Those registering in 2007 and having their complaint taken to formal investigation stage are again more satisfied than their 2004/5 counterparts in all aspects of that process, particularly the time taken to complete the investigation, the speed with which the Complaints Investigator responded, and the fundamental way in which the complaint was handled. This is also true of satisfaction with the final report; 2007 registrants more likely to be satisfied, particularly with the impartiality and recommendations of the report.

Again this finding appears to be closely linked with the speed with which the investigation is carried out.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The office of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) came into operation in October 2002 with the aim of creating a one-stop-shop for complaints about public bodies in Scotland.

The service provided is free, independent and confidential and plays an important role in monitoring public services in Scotland as well as raising public service standards across the country. The organisation employs approximately 47 staff (45.5 FTEs). Of these, 29 are complaints investigators while 18 work on outreach, communications, support and corporate services duties. In the year 2006/07, 2,386 enquiries and 1,842 complaints were received. This represented an overall increase in contact of 14% compared with 2005.

In order to improve its service delivery, the SPSO wished to conduct a research study into its complainants' experience. The research is aimed at helping the Ombudsman to achieve a more complete understanding of complainants' expectations and behaviours when contacting the SPSO. The research aims to identify areas for improvement and support the implementation of new procedures that will enhance the complainant process. This is the SPSO's first comprehensive survey of complainants' experience and covers a three year period. During this time the SPSO has undergone significant changes to its investigation processes and internal structures.

2.2 Key objectives

The key focus of the research was to explore the complainant experience of the process and to gauge their perceptions of the SPSO and the service it provides. The research programme was therefore designed to collect feedback on each stage of the process that a complainant would go through. This included:

- Awareness of the SPSO
- Perceived accessibility of
 - SPSO offices
 - SPSO website
- Feedback on the initial contact
- Aspects of complaints taken / not taken to the formal investigation stage

- Overall perceptions / satisfaction with the service provided
- Suggested measures to improve the service

3 Methodology

3.1 Survey design

In order to gauge complainant perception as well as understand the reasons behind their views, a large-scale postal survey was conducted and this report contains the findings of this research.

3.2 Postal survey

The SPSO provided a list containing contact details for complainants who had had their case closed within the past year. A questionnaire, covering letter and business reply envelope were mailed to 2,056 complainants in early July 2007. This initial mail-out was followed up with two reminder mail-outs to non-respondents, with seven-week fieldwork period closing in late August.

In total, 715 completed questionnaires were returned and processed, representing a response rate of 35%; a respectable return on a self-completion survey with two reminders.

In terms of accuracy levels, this means that we can be 95% confident that the findings are accurate to +/- 3.7%. This means that if 50% of complainants who were surveyed expressed a particular view, we can be 95% confident that between 46.3% and 53.7% of all complainants would feel the same way.

4 Profile

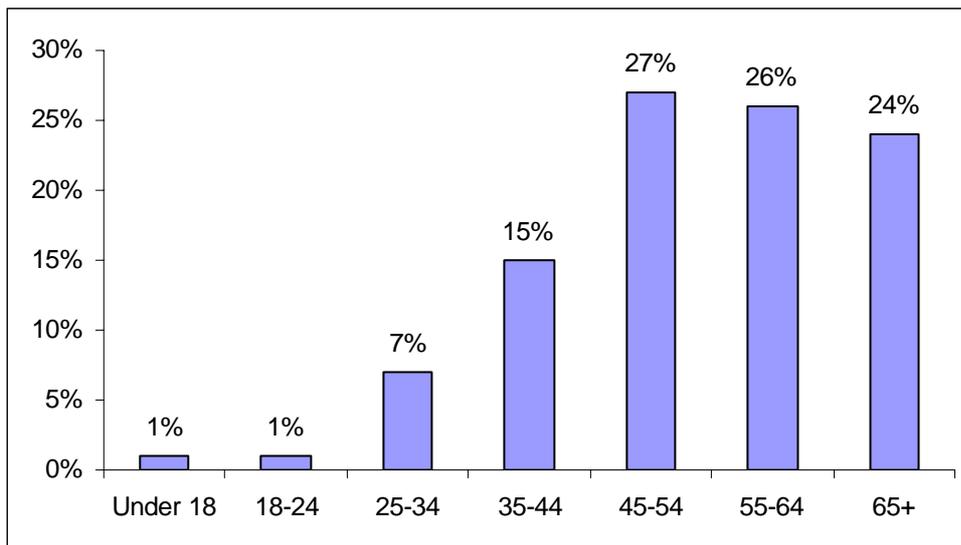
4.1 Gender

Just over half of the complainants completing the survey were male (55%), with 45% stating that they were female.

4.2 Age

As Fig 4.1 shows, the majority of complainants were aged between 45 -54 (27%), 55-64 (26%) or 65+ (24%). Less than one in ten respondents was aged less than 34 years of age.

Fig 4.1: Age profile



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows (688)

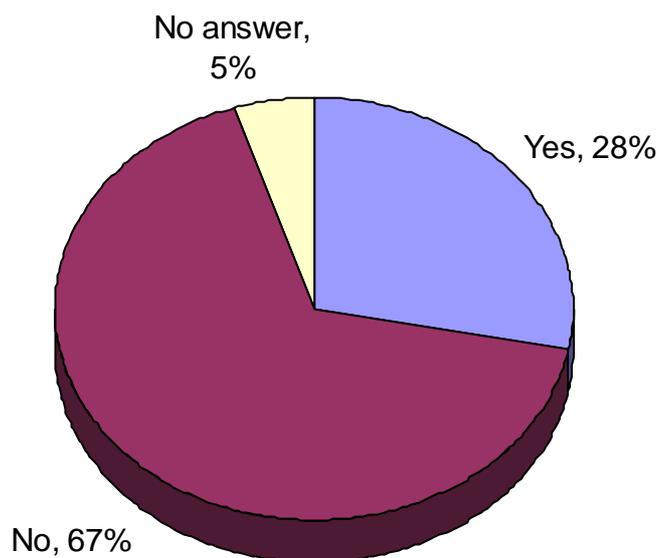
4.3 Ethnicity

The large majority of those taking part in the survey identified themselves as White (96%). Only 4% identified themselves as coming from a mixed, Asian, Black, Chinese or other ethnic group.

4.4 Disability

Over a quarter of those surveyed considered themselves as having a disability. As Fig 4.2 shows, 28% stated that they did have a disability, with 67% stating that they did not.

Fig 4.2: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



Base: All respondents (715)

4.5 Date of complaint / outcome

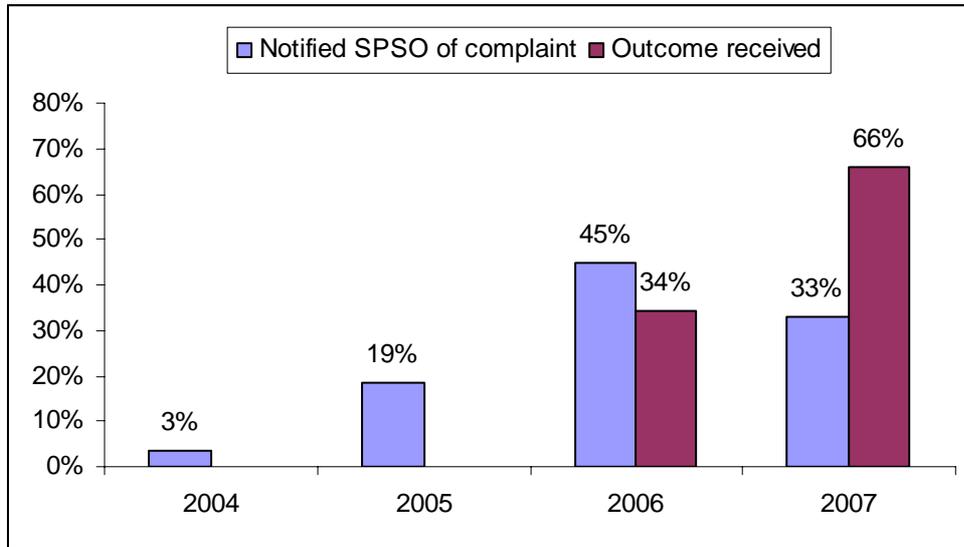
Fig 4.3 shows the year in which complainants had notified the SPSO of their complaint, as well as the year in which they had received an outcome to their complaint. As can be seen, the majority of complainants had notified the SPSO of their complaint either in 2006 (45%) or 2007 (33%), with 19% having made their complaint in 2005 and 3% in 2004.

In terms of the outcome, most complaints had reached an outcome in 2007 (66%) with 34% reaching an outcome in 2006.

Interestingly, only 558 of the 715 complainants identified the date they first notified the SPSO of their complaint, and an even lesser amount (461 respondents) were able to identify when the outcome of their complaint was reached.

This suggests that perhaps complainants were not always clear of when their case had officially been closed by the SPSO.

Fig 4.3: Year SPSO notified of complaint / outcome of complaint received

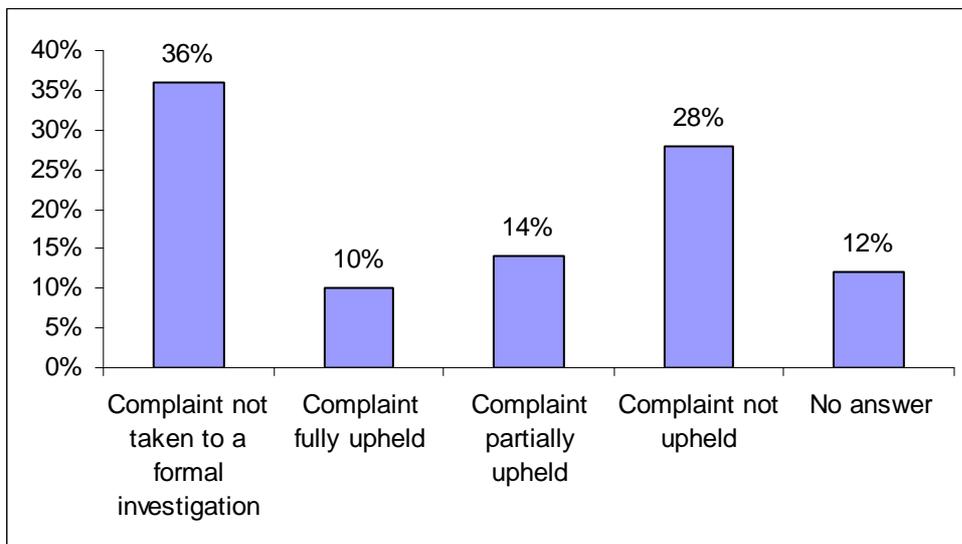


Base: All respondents excluding don't knows (558 & 461)

4.6 Outcome of complaint

All complainants were asked about the final outcome of their complaint. As Fig 4.4 displays, just over a third did not have their complaint taken to a formal investigation (36%). Over a quarter did not have their complaint upheld (28%), 14% had their complaint partially upheld and ten percent had their complaint fully upheld. Interestingly, twelve percent did not answer this question, suggesting that they were either unsure of the final outcome or that they believed their case was still being reviewed.

Fig 4.4: Outcome of complaint



Base: All respondents (715)

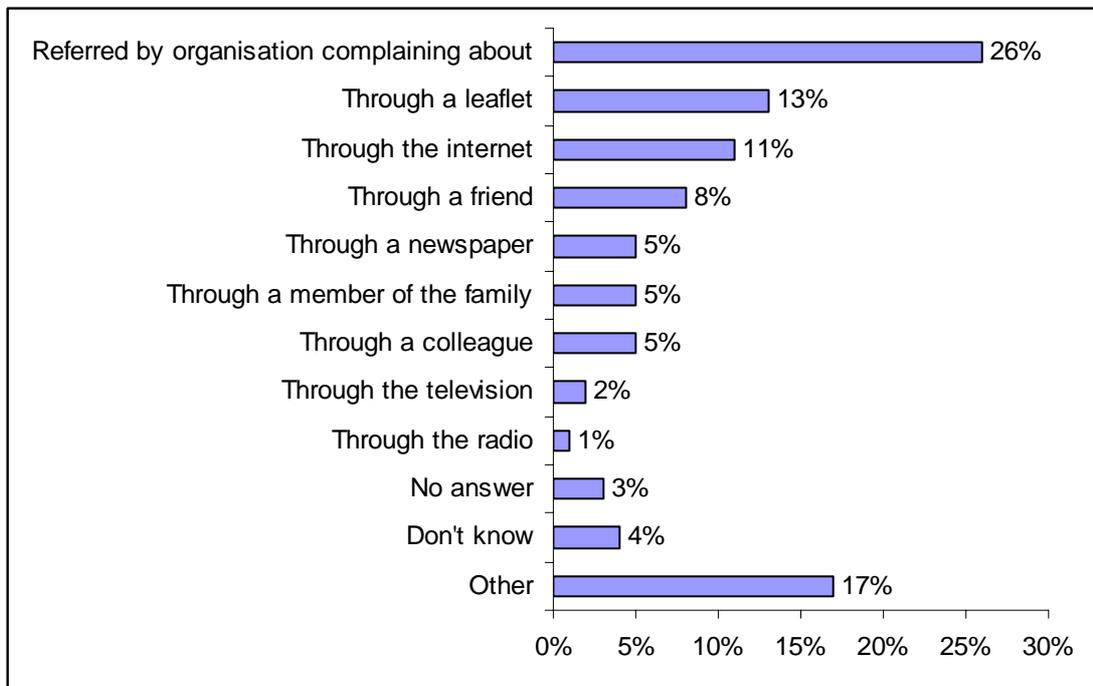
5 Awareness of the SPSO

This chapter explores how complainants had first become aware of the SPSO and what they believed the SPSO would be able to achieve for them.

5.1 Source of awareness

All complainants were asked how they had first heard of the SPSO. As Fig 5.1 illustrates, slightly over a quarter had been referred to the SPSO by the organisation about whom they were complaining (26%). Thirteen percent had come across a leaflet, 11% had heard of the SPSO through the internet and eight percent had heard of them through a friend.

Fig 5.1: How did you first hear about the SPSO?



Base: All respondents (715)

Therefore we can see that it was not typical for complainants to have heard of the SPSO from a particular source. It was interesting to see that largest proportion of complainants cited the organisation whom was the focus of the complaint as their source of awareness, outweighing the proportions citing SPSO promotional material, media links or word of mouth.

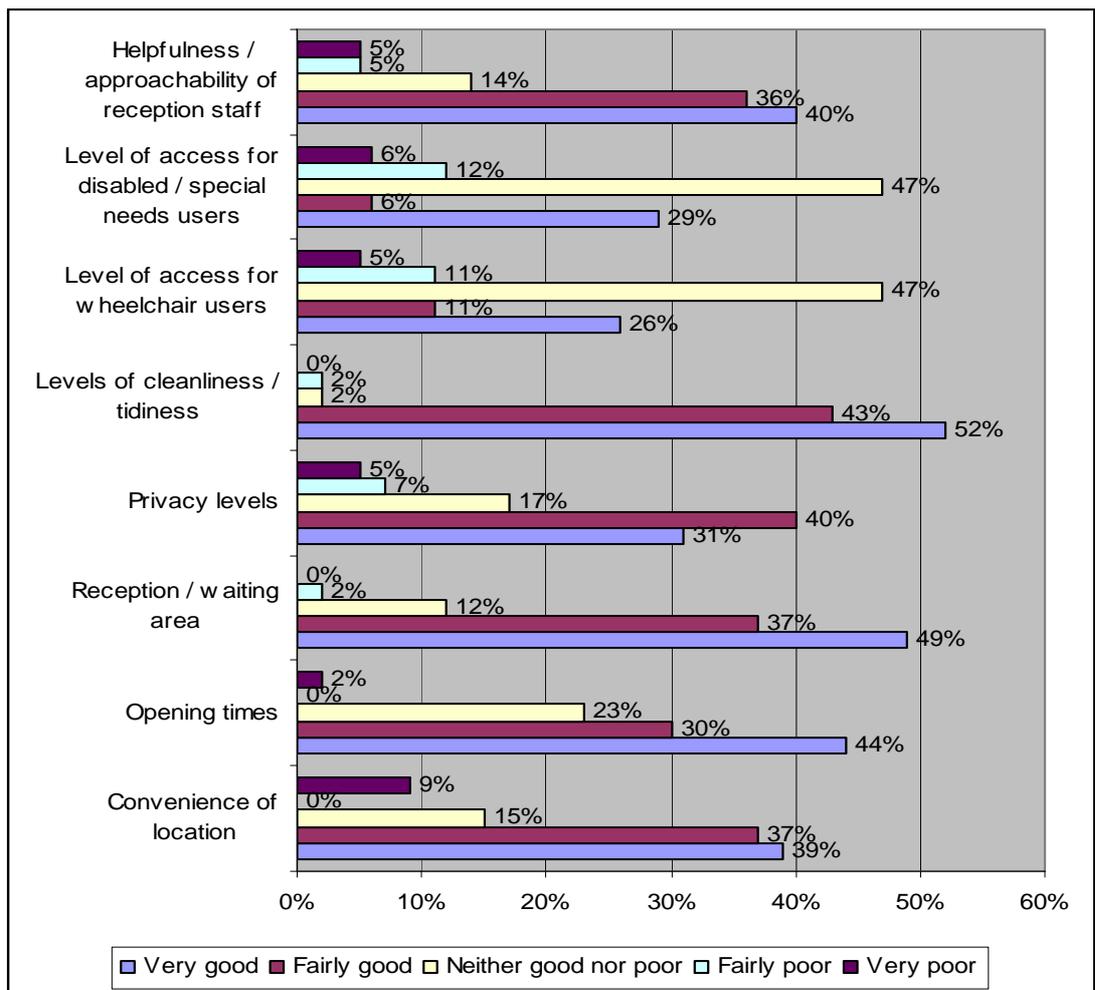
6 Accessibility

This chapter looks at complainants' perceptions of the SPSO offices and SPSO website, as well as their views of SPSO advice literature.

6.1 SPSO offices

It was not common for complainants to have visited the SPSO offices, with only 46 of the 715 respondents stating that they had done so. Given that the SPSO's office is based in Edinburgh and provides an ombudsman service for the whole of Scotland it is perhaps not surprising that not many respondents had actually visited the Edinburgh office. Fig 6.1 shows the perceptions of these 46 respondents, based on their experience of having visited the SPSO offices.

Fig 6.1: How would you rate the following aspects of the SPSO offices?



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows

The majority rated the levels of cleanliness / tidiness (95%) and the reception / waiting area (86%) as fairly / very good, with in the region of half in each case experiencing these as *very good* (52%; 49% respectively). Approximately three-quarters were also positive concerning the helpfulness / approachability of reception staff (76%), the convenience of the location (76%) and the office opening times (74%). So for those who had visited the Edinburgh office the majority felt it a convenient and helpful office.

Seven out of ten also rated the privacy levels afforded to them as good (71%), but with 12% disagreeing and rating them as poor (5% very much so).

All complainants who had visited the SPSO offices were also asked how they would rate the level of access for wheelchair users as well as disabled / special needs users.

6.2 SPSO website

It was more common for complainants to have visited the SPSO website than to have visited offices, with just over a third stating that they had accessed the SPSO website (34%).

Fig 6.2: Have you visited the SPSO website?



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows (683)

Analysis of the data revealed that those within the following sub-groups were found to be most likely to have visited the website:

- Those who had first heard of the SPSO through the internet (90%)
- Those who first contacted the SPSO by email (90%)

- Those aged 25-44 (45%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (40%)

By contrast, those in the following sub-groups were revealed as least likely to have visited the SPSO website:

- Those aged 65+ (16%)
- Those with a disability (23%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO through a leaflet (14%) or a friend (20%)

The findings suggest that younger complainants were more likely than older complainants to have visited the website and those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet, or made their first contact with SPSO via email, were more to visit the website.

The low proportion of those first hearing of the SPSO via a leaflet and then subsequently visiting the website suggests that there is perhaps scope for more references to be made to the website within the leaflet material.

Aspects of the website

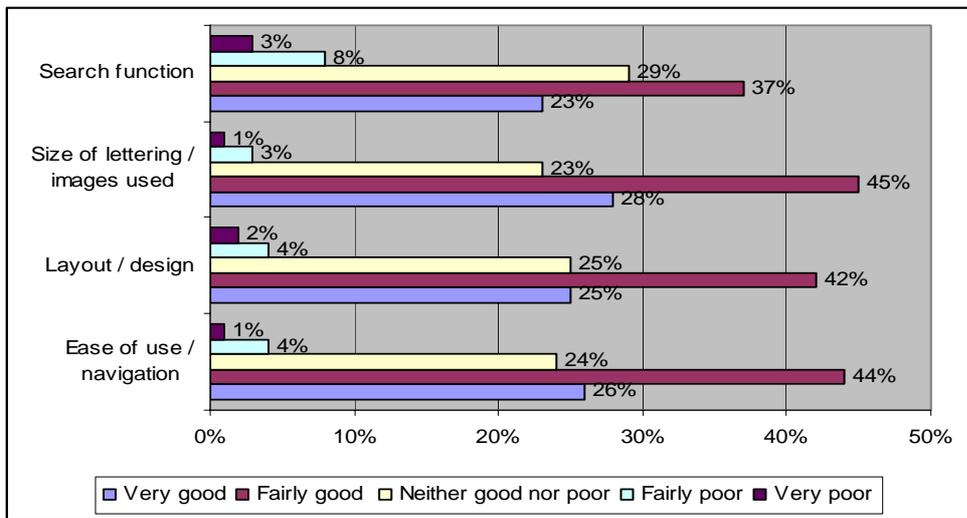
Complainants that had visited the SPSO website were asked how they would rate each of the following four aspects of the website:

- Ease of use / navigation
- Layout / design
- Size of lettering / images used
- Search function

As Fig 6.3 shows, close to three-quarters rated the size of lettering / images used as good (73%). A similar proportion were positive about the ease of use / navigation (70%) and just over two-thirds felt that the layout / design of the website was good (68%). The aspect of the website complainants were least positive about concerned the search function, where 60% rated this aspect as good, but 11% rated it as poor.

It should be noted that the SPSO website meets the standard accessibility recommended by WC3 (the World Wide Web Consortium). The SPSO website also offers the ability for users to change fonts and font sizes.

Fig 6.3: How would you rate the following aspects of the SPSO website?

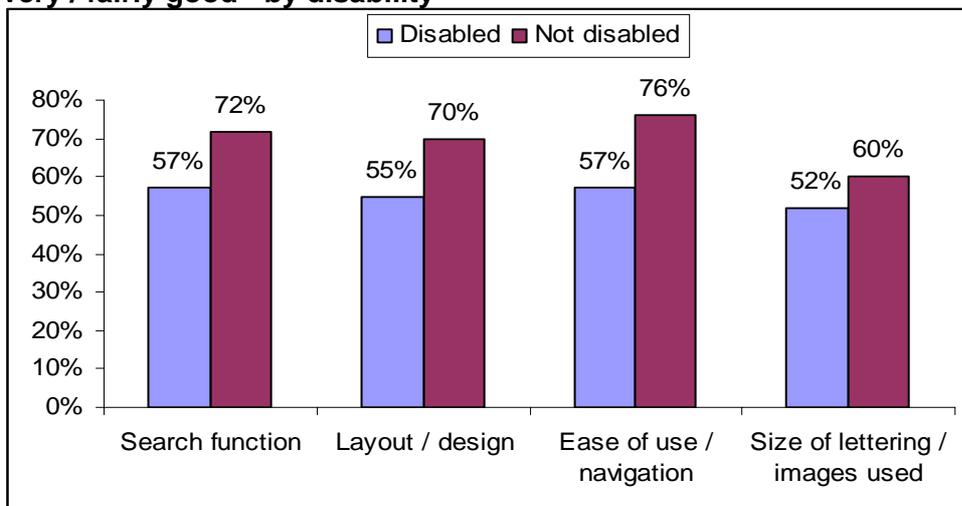


Base: All respondents who had visited the website excluding don't knows

Positively, as is seen in the previous figure, all aspects of the website are rated as 'fairly good' by a consistent four in ten users (between 37% and 45%).

As noted earlier, usage of the website by disabled complainants was low (23%) compared to complainants without a disability (39%). Fig 6.4 shows the proportion of complainants rating each aspect of the website as good, depending on whether or not they have a disability. It can be seen that those with a disability were consistently less positive about each aspect of the website than those without a disability.

Fig 6.4: Proportion of complainants rating each aspect of the website as very / fairly good - by disability



Base: All respondents who have used the website excluding don't knows

This would seem to suggest to some extent that there is a need for the SPSO to review the disabled access features of their website and assess its usability for disabled users. However, it should be borne in mind that when looking at the proportion of disabled users expressing dissatisfaction with each aspect, a low seven percent or less rated each aspect as poor, with no more than 3% finding any aspect to be *very poor*.

Use of 'other language' pages

The SPSO website provides (as well as several leaflets) information translated into the top six languages (polish, Gaelic, Cantonese, Urdu, Bengali and Arabic) as recommended by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

All those who had accessed the SPSO website were asked whether they had used any 'other language' pages, and if so, how they would rate the quality of the information provided. Of the thirty two complainants who had used any "other language" pages, twenty considered the quality to be very or fairly good.

SPSO advice leaflets

It was much more common for complainants to have read an SPSO advice leaflet than to have visited the SPSO offices or website, with over three-quarters stating that they had (78%). Analysis of the data revealed that those in the following sub-groups were most likely to have read an advice leaflet:

- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (87%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (83%)
- Those who had visited the SPSO website (83%)

By contrast, those in the following sub-groups were least likely to have read an SPSO advice leaflet:

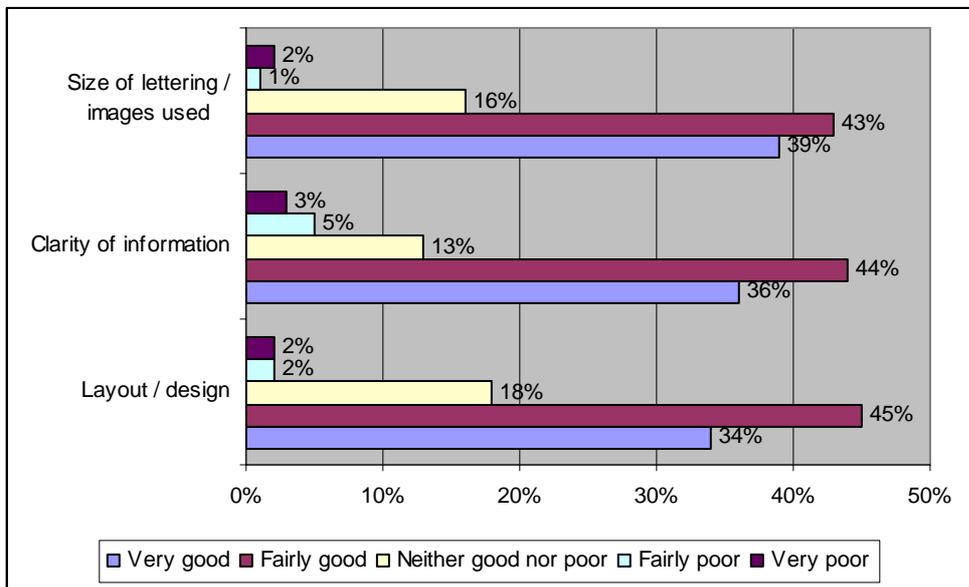
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a friend (65%)
- Those aged 65+ (73%)
- Those with a disability (73%)
- Those who first contacted the SPSO via email (73%)

The large majority of the leaflets read were printed in English, with only two respondents mentioning that they had read a leaflet in large print format and none in either in pamphlets published in Braille or in the leaflets translated into one of top six languages as recommended by the Equal Opportunities

Commission all of which are provided by the SPSO. Although not asked about the free translation and interpreting service provided by the SPSO, no one mentioned this spontaneously.

In terms of the quality of leaflets, as Fig 6.5 shows, approximately four out of five respondents rated each aspect as good (ie, a combination of both very and fairly). Indeed, more than one third in each case found aspects of the leaflet to be very good.

Fig 6.5: How would you rate each of the following aspects of SPSO leaflets?



Base: All respondents who have read an SPSO advice leaflet excluding don't knows

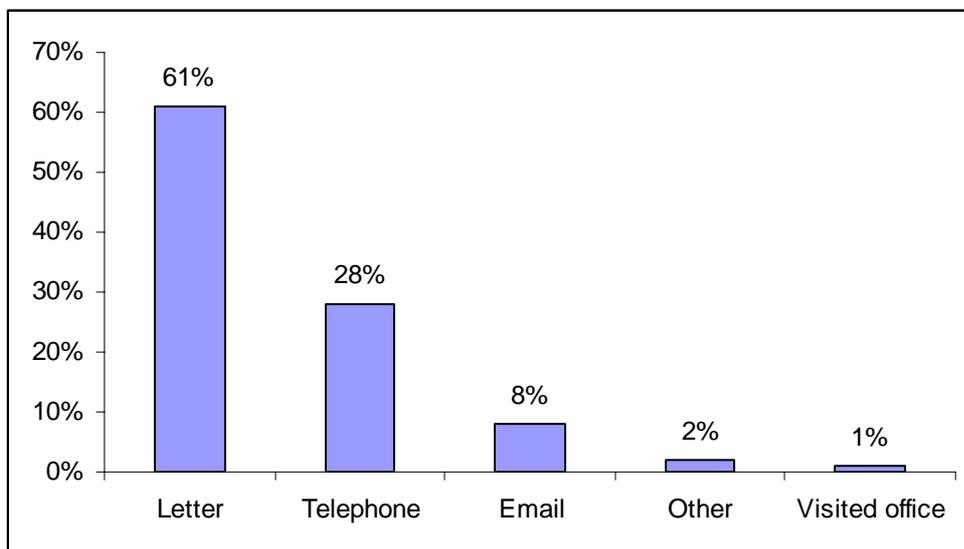
7 Initial contact

This chapter investigates the experience of the complainants when first contacting the SPSO, gauging their initial perceptions of SPSO staff members.

7.1 First contact

The majority of complainants first contacted the SPSO by letter (61%). Over a quarter opted to use the telephone (28%), with only 8% first contacting the SPSO by email.

Fig 7.1: How did you first contact the SPSO?



Base: All respondents excluding no answer (684)

Analysis of those who opted to either write a letter or use the telephone revealed some interesting differences. Those in the following sub-groups were identified as most likely to have written a letter:

- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (71%)
- Those who had their complaint partially upheld (68%)
- Those who did not feel additional communication methods would help (68%)
- Those aged 65+ (67%)
- Those who had not visited the SPSO website (67%)

In contrast, those in the following sub-groups were identified as most likely to have telephoned the SPSO:

- Those aged 25-44 (33%)
- Those with a disability (33%)
- Those who felt additional communication methods would help (33%)

To summarise then, older complainants who had first come across the SPSO via a leaflet were more likely to write a letter, whereas more middle-aged complainants were more likely to opt to use the telephone.

Aspects of first contact

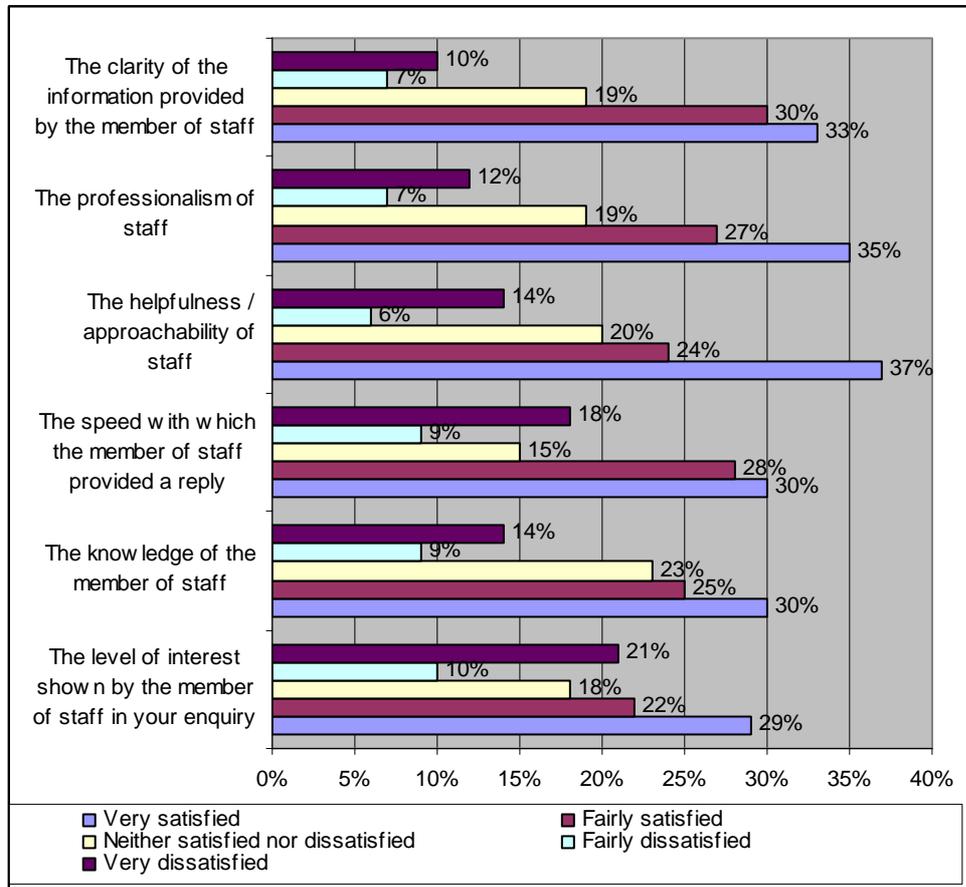
Fig 7.2a shows how satisfied or dissatisfied complainants were with the following aspects of service received when first contacting the SPSO:

- The clarity of the information provided by the member of staff
- The professionalism of staff
- The helpfulness / approachability of staff
- The knowledge of the member of staff
- The speed with which the member of staff provided a reply
- The level of interest shown by the member of staff in their enquiry

As can be seen, complainants were most commonly satisfied with the clarity of information provided (63%), the professionalism of staff (62%) and the helpfulness / approachability of staff (61%); approximately a third in each case very much so (33%; 35% and 37% respectively).

At the lower end of the scale, fewer complainants were satisfied with the level of interest shown by the member of staff in their enquiry (51%), the knowledge of the staff member (56%) and the speed with which the member of staff provided a reply (59%). Indeed, in the region of one in five complainants were very dissatisfied with the level of interest and speed of response (21% and 18% respectively).

Fig 7.2a: How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with each aspect of service when first contacting the SPSO?



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows

The level of interest shown by the member of staff in the complainants' enquiry was shown to attract the lowest level of satisfaction (51%; comprising 29% who thought this to be very good, and 22% who rated staff interest at fairly good).

Sub-groups less likely than average (ie, less than 51%) to be satisfied with the level of interest shown by the member of staff include those who did not have their complaint investigated (38%) and those who did not have their complaint upheld (42%). These findings suggest a link between the complaint outcome and satisfaction with the perceived level of interest shown by SPSO staff members.

The table below provides a sectoral breakdown of satisfaction with aspects of first contact with the SPSO, by five key categories. Complainants within the health sector are consistently more likely than those within local authorities to be satisfied with all elements of their first contact with the SPSO.

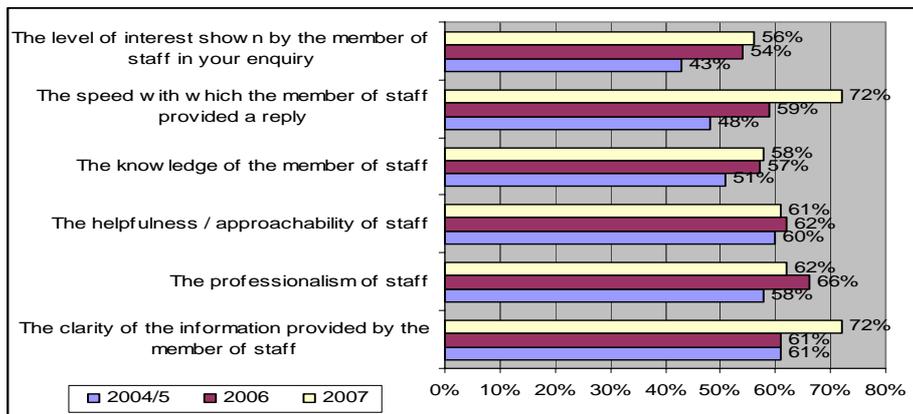
Fig 7.2b Proportion of complainants very / fairly satisfied with various elements of first contact with the SPSO – by sector (%)

	Health	Local Authority	Housing*	Education*	Scottish Executive*	Other*
The clarity of the information provided by the member of staff	69	63	64	67	35	71
The professionalism of staff	69	61	66	47	31	67
The helpfulness / approachability of staff	68	60	64	44	31	57
The knowledge of the member of staff	60	55	61	44	20	57
The speed with which the member of staff provided a reply	64	59	55	47	36	86
The level of interest shown by the member of staff in your inquiry	55	52	54	44	19	57
<i>Base: All respondents excluding don't knows</i>						
<i>*Small base – figures are indicative only</i>						

First contact – changes over time

As shown in the figure below, levels of satisfaction with the clarity of information provided by the member of staff, their knowledge, the level of interest shown, and (most notably) the speed with which they replied to the contact are all higher amongst complainants who first registered their complaint in 2007.

Fig 7.3: When you first contacted the SPSO, how satisfied were you with.....?



Base: All respondents 2004/5 (147); 2006 (281); 2007 (190)

Figures are an aggregate of very satisfied and fairly satisfied, to show overall satisfaction with the various elements of the SPSO complaints process.

Perceptions of the helpfulness / approachability of staff are broadly the same (approaching two-thirds being satisfied) regardless of when respondents first notified the SPSO of their complaint. Whilst satisfaction with the professionalism of staff is lower for those notifying the SPSO in 2007 than 2006, it remains higher than recorded for complainants first contacting the Ombudsman in 2004/5.

8 Complaints not taken to the formal investigation stage

This chapter looks at the experience of complainants for whom complaints were *not* taken to the formal investigation stage.

8.1 Satisfaction with aspects of service

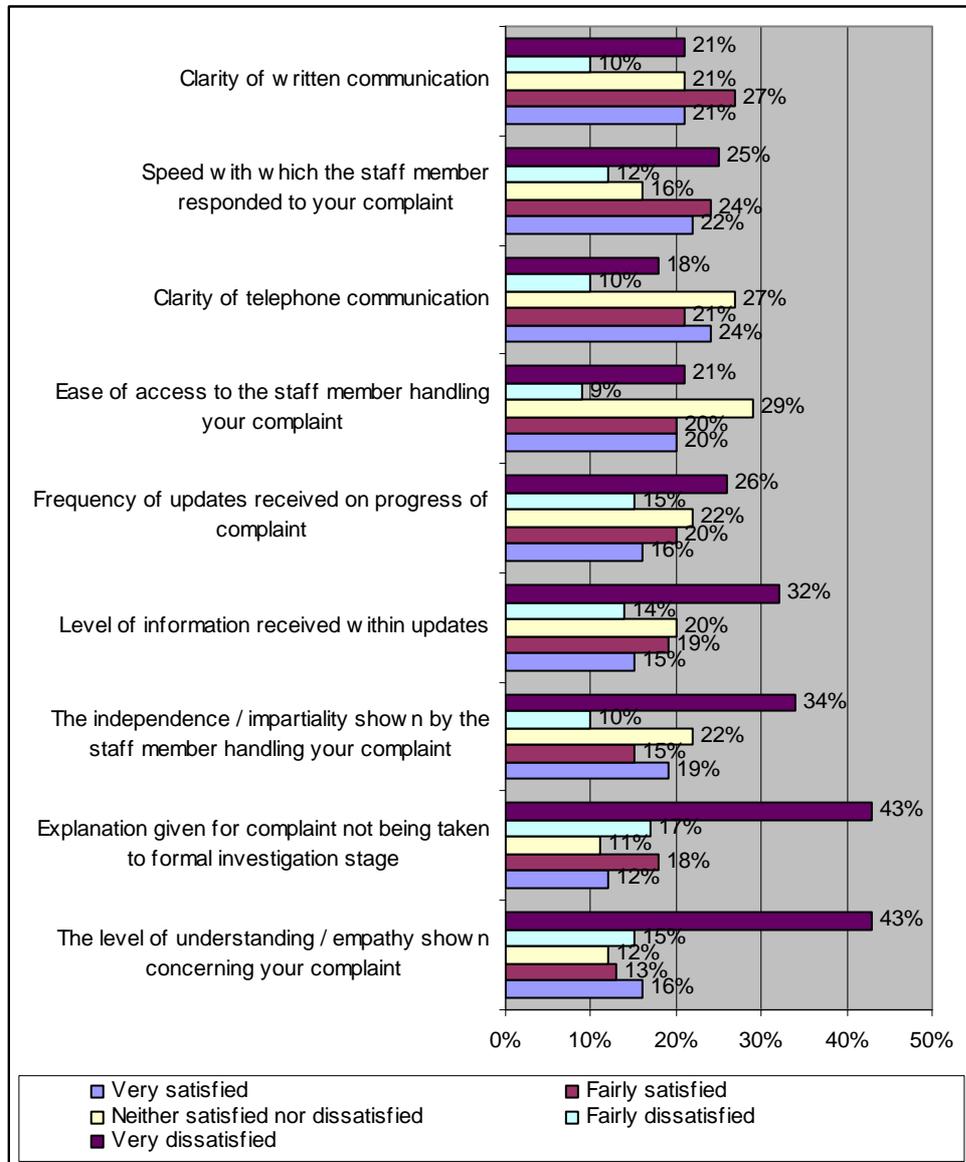
All complainants who did not have their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage were asked to express how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each of the following aspects of service:

- Explanation given for complaint not being taken to formal investigation stage
- Clarity of written communication
- Clarity of telephone communication
- Speed with which the staff member responded to their complaint
- Frequency of updates received on progress of complaint
- Level of information received within updates
- The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint
- The independence / impartiality shown by the staff member handling their complaint
- Ease of access to the staff member handling their complaint

Fig 8.1a shows that fewer than complainants were most commonly satisfied with the clarity of written communication (47%), the speed with which the staff member responded to their complaint (46%) and the clarity of telephone communication (45%).

By contrast, complainants were less satisfied with the level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint (29%), the explanation that was given for their complaint not being taken to the formal investigation stage (30%), the independence / impartiality shown by the staff member handling their complaint (34%) and the level of information received within updates (34%).

Fig 8.1a: Satisfaction with aspects of service of those who did not have complaint taken to formal investigation stage



Base: All whose complaint was not taken to formal investigation stage excluding don't knows

The two aspects of the process where complainants showed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction concerned:

- The explanation given for the complaint not being taken to the formal investigation stage
- The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint

The following analysis of these two aspects helps identify the characteristics of the complainants most commonly dissatisfied.

‘The explanation given for the complaint not being taken to the formal investigation stage’

Analysis of the data revealed that complainants within the following sub-groups were most likely to be dissatisfied with the explanation given for the complaint not being taken to the formal investigation stage:

- Those with a disability (69%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (67%)
- Male complainants (66%)
- Those who felt additional communication methods would help (65%)
- Those aged 45-64 (64%)

‘The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint’

Similarly, those within the following sub-groups were most likely to be dissatisfied with the level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint:

- Those who were not directed to other organisations following the outcome of their complaint (75%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (67%) or the internet (65%)
- Male complainants (65%)
- Those who had visited the SPSO website (63%)
- Those with a disability (63%)
- Those aged 65+ (62%)

In terms of complainant profile, the findings suggest that older, male complainants, potentially with a disability were most commonly dissatisfied with the explanation given and level of understanding / empathy shown. It was also found that those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet were particularly likely to be dissatisfied with these two aspects of the service, and in terms of the level of understanding / empathy shown, those who were not directed to other organisations following the outcome of their complaint were revealed to be particularly disgruntled. The table below shows satisfaction by sector; however, due to small sample bases comparisons should be made with caution.

Fig 8.1b: Satisfaction with aspects of service of those who did not have complaint taken to formal investigation stage – by sector

	Health *	Local Authority	Housing*	Education*	Scottish Executive*	Other*
Explanation given for complaint not being taken to formal investigation stage	27	31	38	20	15	40
Clarity of written communication	47	46	61	55	29	60
Clarity of telephone communication	45	47	50	33	21	33
Speed with which the staff member responded to your complaint	44	47	54	36	38	60
Frequency of updates received on progress of complaint	35	37	45	30	32	50
Level of information received within updates	31	35	41	30	26	33
The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning your complaint	28	31	34	27	10	40
The independence / impartiality shown by the staff member handling your complaint	29	36	41	50	19	40
Ease of access to the staff member handling your complaint	34	44	55	33	15	50
<i>Base: All respondents whose complaint was not taken to the formal investigation stage excluding don't knows</i>						
<i>*Small sample bases – figures are indicative only</i>						

8.2 Action following the SPSO decision

All complainants who did *not* have their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage were asked whether they decided to pursue their complaint further.

Almost half (46%) did decide to pursue their complaint. Those in the following sub-groups were found to be particularly likely to pursue their complaint:

- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (57%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (57%)
- Those aged 25-44 (54%)

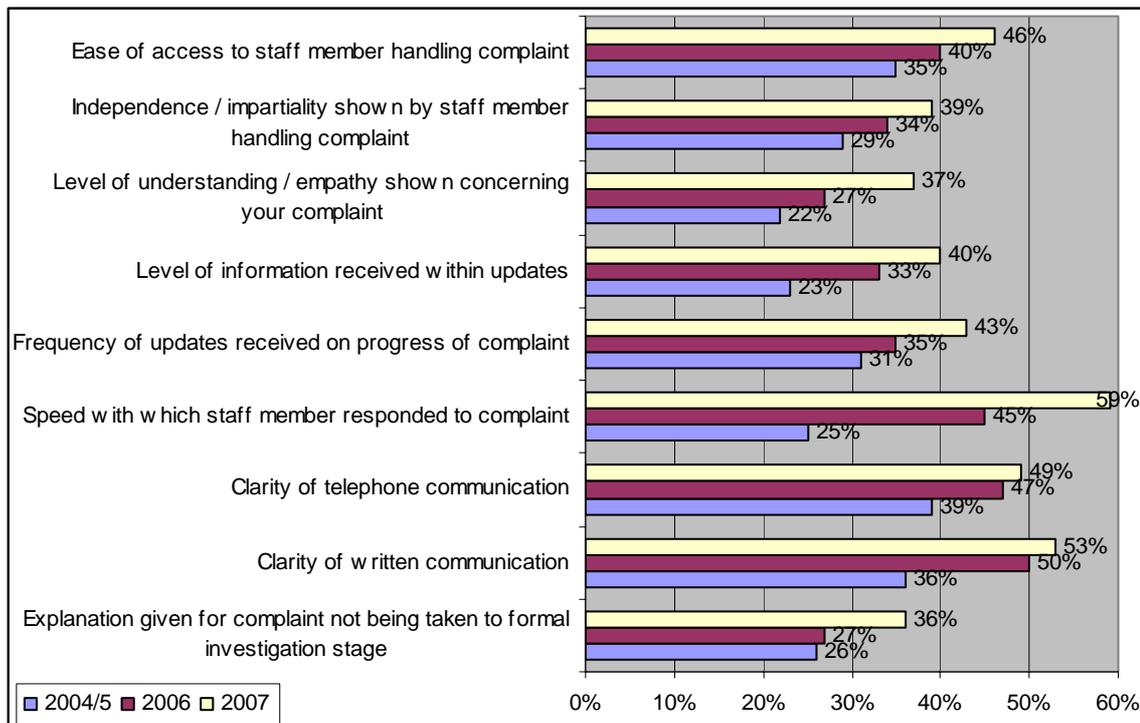
Those that did decide to pursue their case further were asked whether the SPSO directed them to other organisations that may have been able to assist them. Twenty-nine percent were directed to other organisations by the SPSO, but the remaining 71% were not.

Complaints *not* taken to formal investigation stage – Changes over time

Amongst those whose complaint was *not* taken to formal investigation stage, satisfaction with all aspects of the SPSO communication process is higher for complainants first notifying the SPSO of their complaint in 2007 than for those who did so in 2004/5. This is most notable with regards:

- Speed with which staff member responded to your complaint (34% higher); and,
- Both the level of information received within updates, and its clarity (17% higher).

Fig 8.2: How satisfied were you with each of the following, in regards to your complaint that was not taken to the formal investigation stage?



Base: Respondents whose complaint was not taken to the formal investigation stage: bases vary

Figures are an aggregate of very satisfied and fairly satisfied, to show overall satisfaction with the various elements of the SPSO complaints process.

9 Complaints taken to the formal investigation stage

This chapter reviews the experience of those who had their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage.

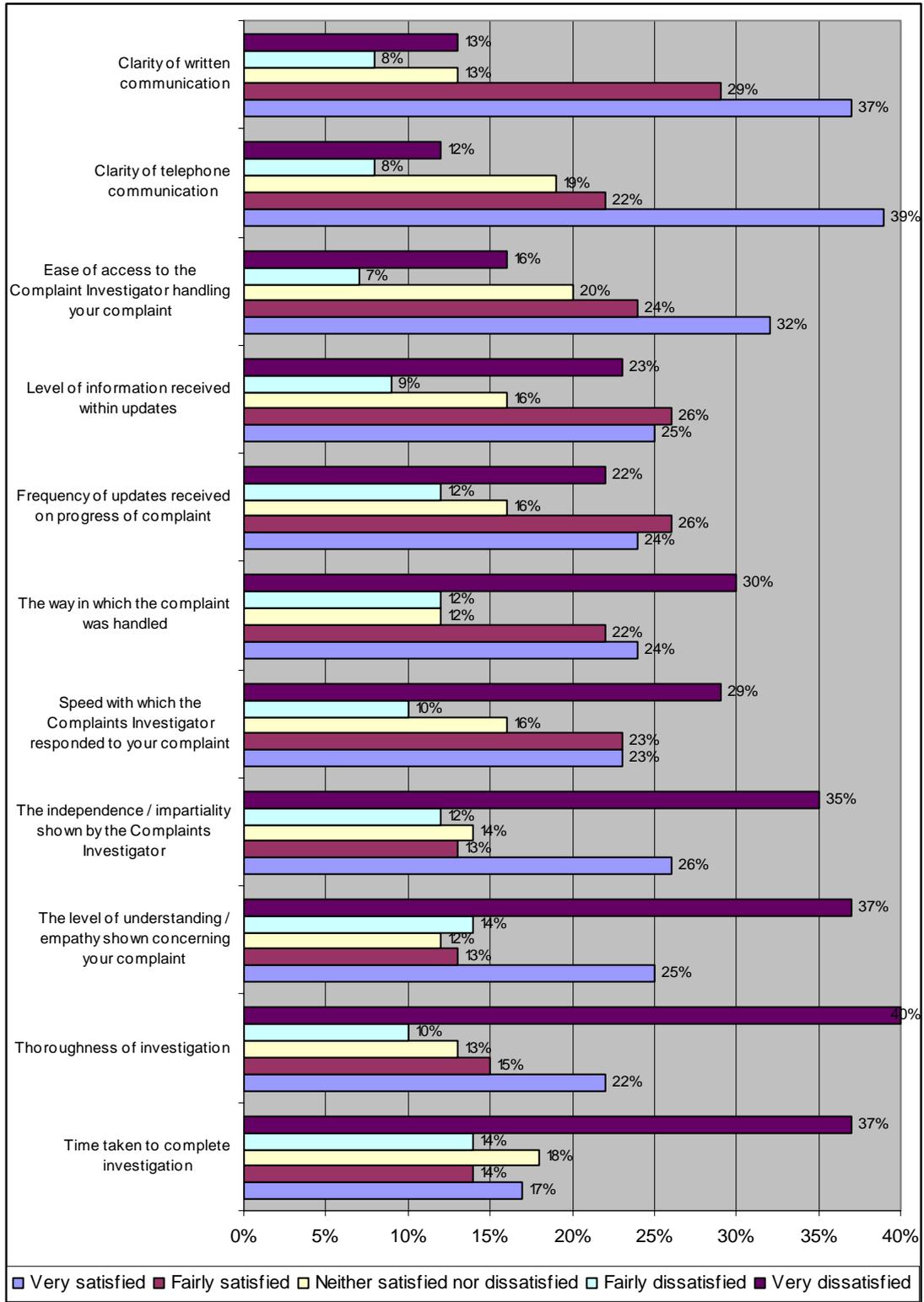
9.1 Satisfaction with aspects of service

Similarly to those who did not have their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage, all complainants who had their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage were asked to state how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each of the following aspects of service:

- The way in which the complaint was handled
- Clarity of written communication
- Clarity of telephone communication
- Frequency of updates received on progress of complaint
- Level of information received within updates
- Speed with which the Complaints Investigator responded to your complaint
- Time taken to complete investigation
- Thoroughness of investigation
- The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning your complaint
- The independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator
- Ease of access to the Complaint Investigator handling your complaint

Fig 9.1 shows that complainants were most frequently satisfied with the clarity of written communication (66%), clarity of telephone communication (61%) and the ease of accessing the Complaint Investigator handling their complaint (56%). It is particularly positive to note that at least one third in each respect were *very* satisfied (37%; 39% and 32%).

Fig 9.1a Satisfaction with aspects of service of those who had complaint taken to formal investigation stage



Base: All respondents who had their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage excluding don't knows

There were four aspects of service that attracted the highest levels of dissatisfaction:

- The time taken to complete the investigation (51% dissatisfied)
- The thoroughness of the investigation (50% dissatisfied)
- The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning the complaint (51% dissatisfied)
- The independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator (47% dissatisfied)

The following, more detailed inspection of these four aspects of service, helps to pinpoint the type of complainants most commonly dissatisfied. This analysis first examines each aspect individually and then draws overall conclusions about the common characteristics of complaints likely to be dissatisfied.

‘The time taken to complete the investigation’

Closer inspection of the data revealed that complainants in the following sub-groups were most likely to be dissatisfied with the time taken to complete the investigation:

- Those who had notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (64%)
- Those aged 25-44 (63%)
- Those who had visited the SPSO website (58%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (55%)

‘The thoroughness of the investigation’

Again, looking at the data in closer detail revealed that those in the following sub-groups were most likely to be dissatisfied with the thoroughness of the investigation:

- Those aged 25-44 (73%)
- Male complainants (56%)
- Those who had notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (55%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (55%)

‘The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning the complaint’

Those who were dissatisfied with the level of understanding / empathy shown concerning their complaint could most commonly be found in the following sub-groups:

- Those aged 25-44 (70%)
- Those who had notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (57%)
- Male complainants (56%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (55%)

‘The independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator’

Finally, looking at the type of complaint who most frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator, we can see that they most commonly fell into the following groups:

- Those aged 25-44 (67%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a friend (56%)
- Those who had notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (56%)

Overall, there appears to be a clear tendency for complainants expressing dissatisfaction with each of these four aspects of service to share common characteristics. They were generally more likely to be male, within the 25-44 age category and to have made their initial complaint known to the SPSO in 2005.

The table below shows levels of satisfaction according to complainant sector; as previously, care should be taken in analysis, due to low sample bases (ie, 6 respondents in Education; 12 Scottish Executive; 19 Housing). As with complainants whose enquiries were *not* formally investigated, there is some indication that those in the Health Sector are more likely to be satisfied with the processes than Local Authority complainants.

Fig 9.1b Proportion of those who had complaint taken to formal investigation stage satisfied with aspects of service – by sector (%)

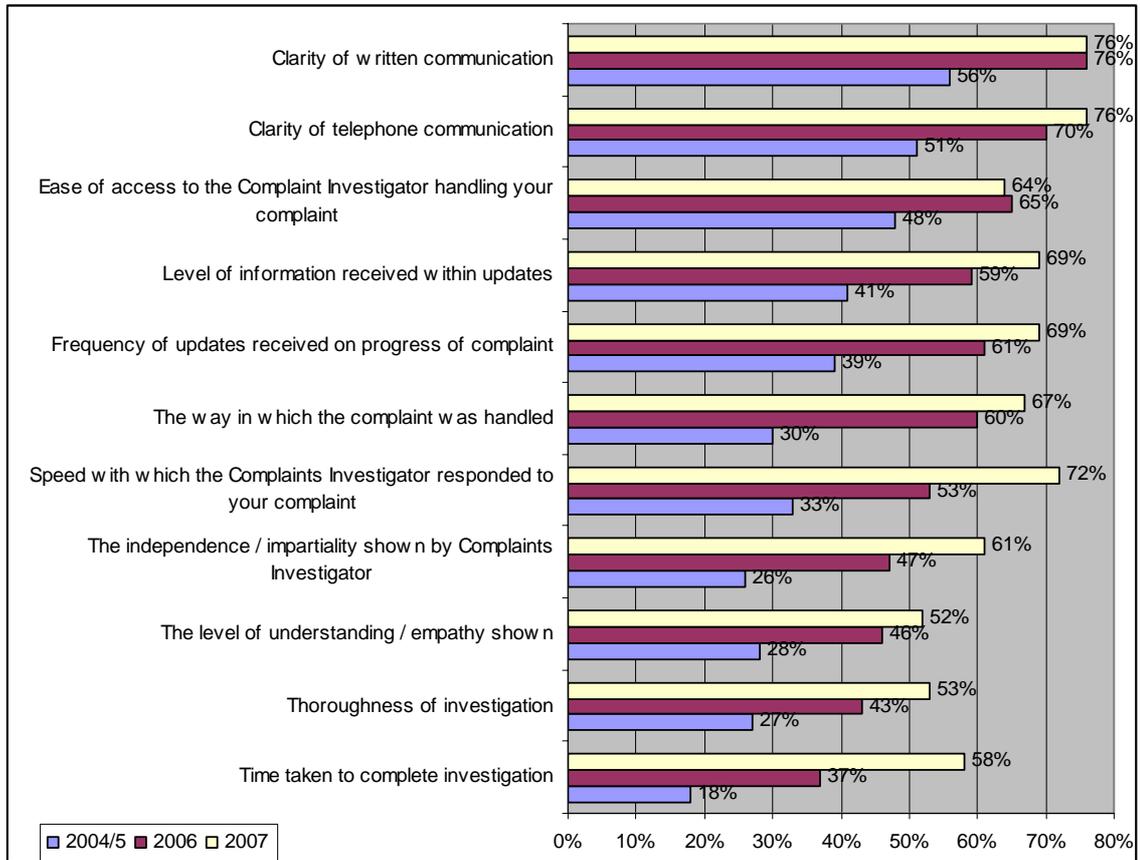
	Health *	Local Authority	Housing*	Education*	Scottish Executive*	Other
Way in which complaint was handled	53	47	38	17	8	-
Clarity of written communication	70	67	76	50	17	-
Clarity of telephone communication	68	59	67	40	30	-
Frequency of updates received on progress of complaint	58	48	45	50	25	-
Level of information received within updates	57	51	45	33	25	-
Speed with which the Complaints Investigator responded to your complaint	56	40	40	50	33	-
Time taken to complete investigation	34	30	37	33	8	-
Thoroughness of investigation	41	36	30	40	17	-
The level of understanding / empathy shown concerning your complaint	44	36	40	17	8	-
The independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator	47	39	26	17	8	-
Ease of access to the Complaints Investigator handling your complaint	61	56	63	33	25	-
<i>Base: All respondents whose complaint was taken to the formal investigation stage excluding don't knows</i>						
<i>*Small sample bases – figures are indicative only</i>						

Complaints taken to formal investigation stage – Changes over time

Satisfaction amongst those whose complaint was taken to a formal investigation is notably higher for those notifying the SPSO in 2007 as compared with complainants whose first contact with the SPSO was in 2004/5. This is true in all cases other than that with ease of access to the Complaints Investigator, which is (an insignificant) 1% lower for complainants notifying the Ombudsman in 2007 compared to 2006. Satisfaction with the following aspects is most notably higher for those first contacting the SPSO about their complaint most recently (i.e., 2007 vs 2004/5):

- Time taken to complete investigation (40% difference);
- Speed with which the Complaints Investigator responded to your complaint (39%);
- Way in which the complaint was handled (37%); and,
- Independence / impartiality shown by the Complaints Investigator (35%).

Fig 9.1c: How satisfied were you with each of the following, in regards to your complaint that was taken to the formal investigation stage?



Base: Respondents whose complaint was taken to the formal investigation stage: bases vary

Figures are an aggregate of very satisfied and fairly satisfied, to show overall satisfaction with the various elements of the SPSO complaints process.

9.2 Perceptions of final report

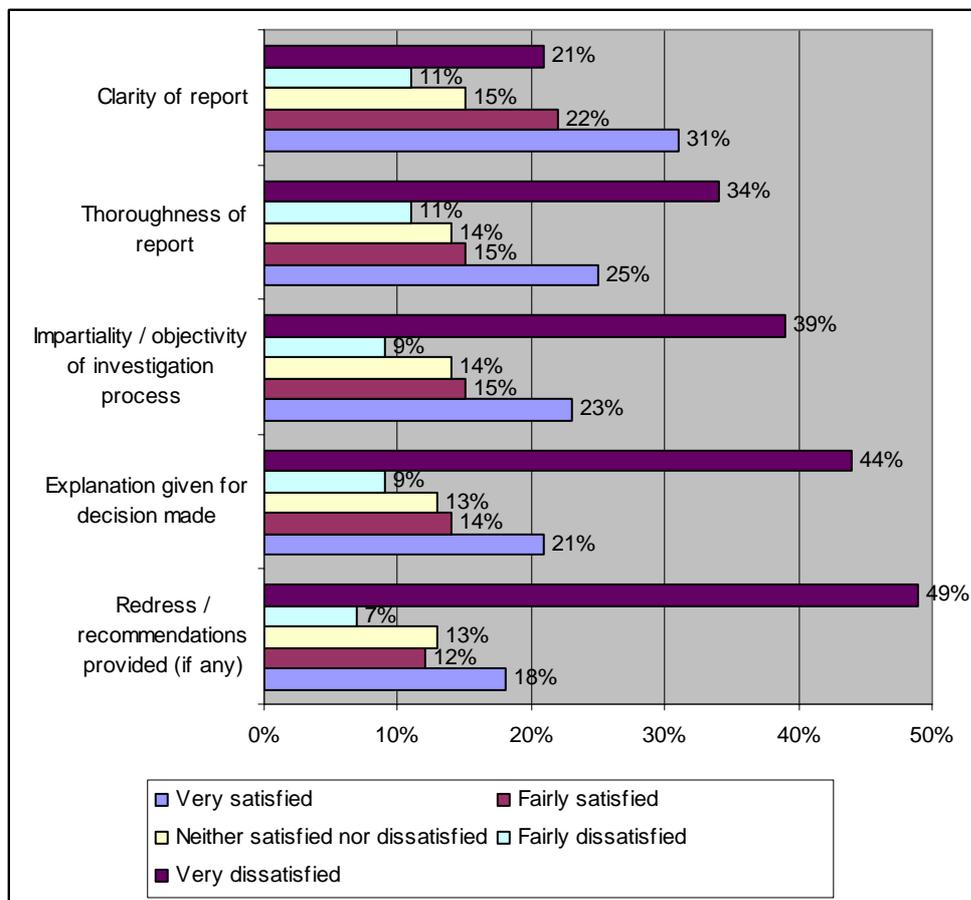
At the end of each complaint taken to the formal investigation stage, complainants should receive a final report from the SPSO. All complainants who had their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the following aspects of the final SPSO report:

- Clarity of report
- Thoroughness of report
- Explanation given for decision made
- Impartiality / objectivity of investigation process
- Redress / recommendations provided (if any)

As Fig 9.2 displays, satisfaction levels tended to be relatively low. The only aspect that over half of the complainants expressed satisfaction with concerned the clarity of the report (53%).

Forty five percent were dissatisfied with the thoroughness of the report while 48% expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the impartiality / objectivity of the investigation process. Fifty three percent were dissatisfied with the explanation given for the decision that was made and 57% were dissatisfied with the opportunities for redress / recommendations provided.

Fig 9.2a: Perceptions of final report



Base: All respondents who had their complaint taken to the formal investigation stage excluding don't knows

The two areas where complainants expressed most dissatisfaction concerned the explanation given for the decision made, and the opportunities for redress / recommendations provided.

‘Explanation for decision made’

Interrogation of the data revealed that complainants within the following sub-groups were most likely to be dissatisfied with the explanation that was given for the decision made:

- Those aged 25-44 (70%)
- Those who had first contacted the SPSO by telephone (64%) or email (56%)
- Those who first made their complaint in 2005 (56%)

‘Redress / recommendations provided’

Similarly, those in the following sub-groups were identified as most commonly being dissatisfied with the opportunities for redress and the recommendations (if any) provided by the SPSO:

- Those aged 25-44 (76%)
- Those who had first contacted the SPSO by telephone (71%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (69%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (63%)
- Those who had visited the SPSO offices (62%)

As was the case for complainants who did not have their case taken to the formal investigation stage, complainants who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 and fell into the 25-44 age band were commonly dissatisfied.

The table below shows levels of satisfaction with the final report by sector. As stated throughout, comparisons should only be made cautiously, given the small sample sizes. As with other elements of the SPSO service, there is some evidence that those operating within the health sector are more likely to be satisfied with the SPSO process than those working within local authorities.

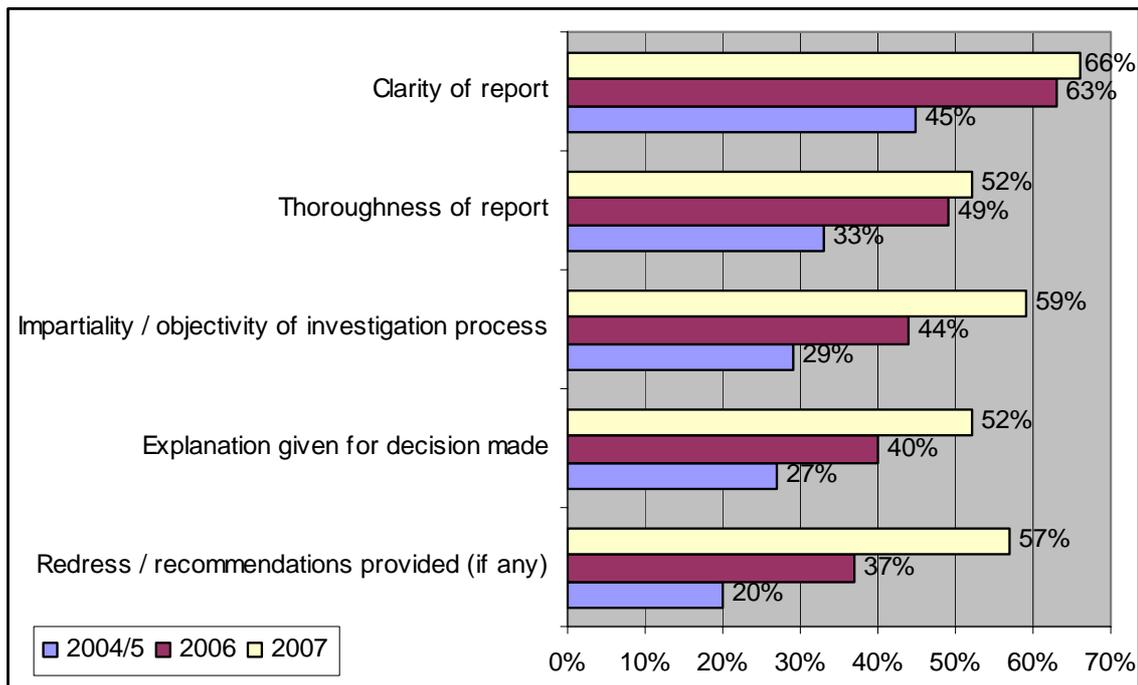
Fig 9.2b Proportion of respondents satisfied with elements of the final report – by sector (%)

	Health *	Local Authority	Housing*	Education*	Scottish Executive*	Other
Clarity of report	58	50	70	20	17	-
Thoroughness of report	44	40	40	40	17	-
Explanation given for decision made	41	33	29	20	17	-
Impartiality / objectivity of investigation process	45	38	28	20	8	-
Redress / recommendations provided (if any)	33	31	35	-	9	-
<i>Base: All respondents whose complaint was taken to the formal investigation stage excluding don't knows</i>						
<i>*Small sample bases – figures are indicative only</i>						

Satisfaction with final report – Changes over time

For those whose complaint was taken to a formal investigation stage, satisfaction with all elements of the final written report is higher for those first contacting the SPSO in 2007 than those doing so in 2004/5, most obviously with regards impartiality (59% compared with 29%) and recommendations (57% compared with 20%).

Fig 9.3: Thinking about the final report, how satisfied were you with each of the following?



Base: Respondents whose complaint was taken to the formal investigation stage: bases vary

Figures are an aggregate of very satisfied and fairly satisfied, to show overall satisfaction with the various elements of the SPSO complaints process.

It is here in particular that satisfaction figures may well reflect the speed of the process being swifter for 2007 complainants than for others who may have waited two years or more for a resolution.

10 General Experience

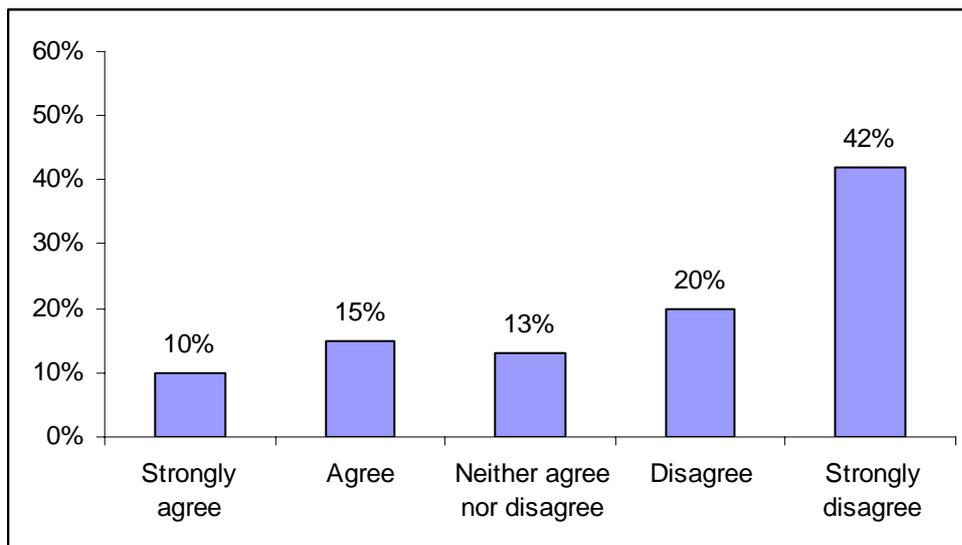
This chapter looks at complainants' experience of interacting with the SPSO overall and their likelihood of using the SPSO again, or recommending them to others.

10.1 Extent expectations met

All complainants were asked to consider, thinking back to what they had wanted the SPSO to originally do for them, to what extent had the SPSO met their original expectations.

As Fig 10.1 shows, 62% did not feel that the SPSO had met their original expectations. Only one in four stated that the SPSO had met their original expectations (25%).

Fig 10.1: Extent complaints agree or disagree that SPSO met their original expectations



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows (673)

Analysis of the data revealed that those in the following sub-groups were most likely to disagree, stating that the SPSO had not met their original expectations:

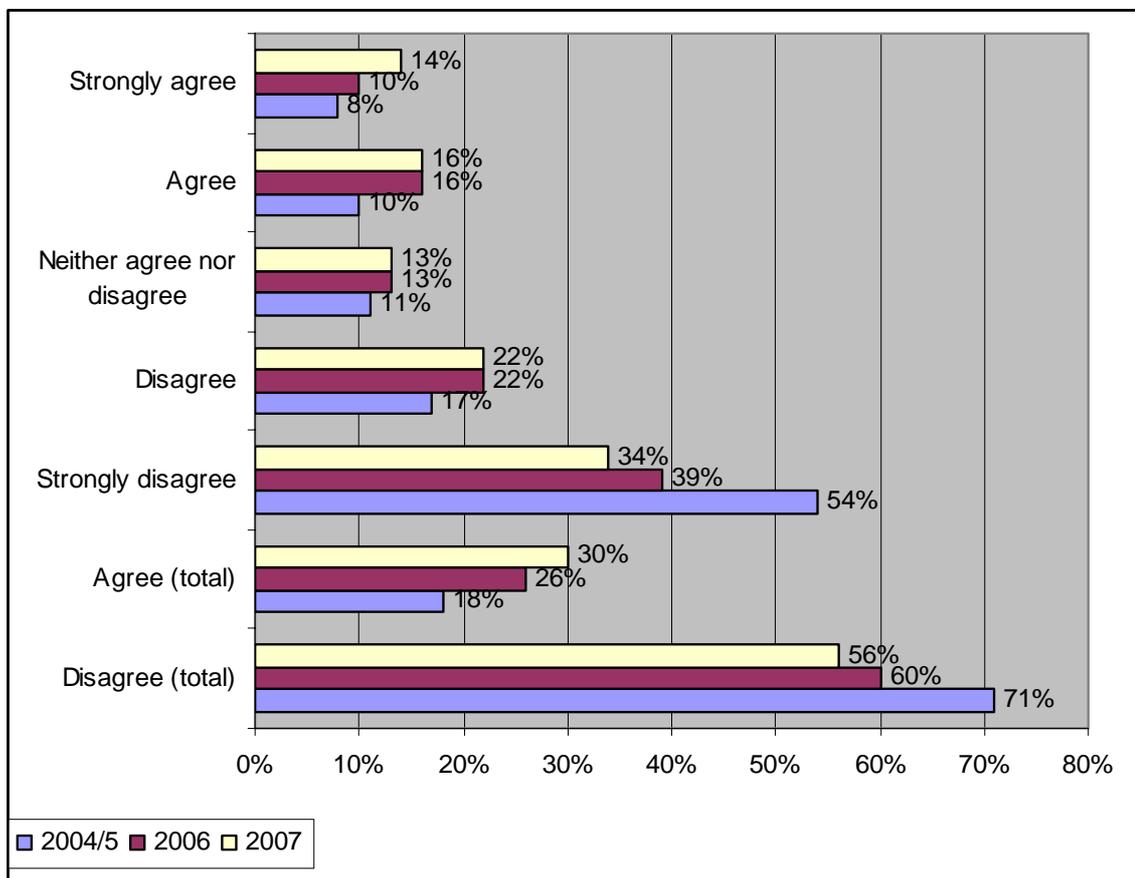
- Those who did not have their complaint investigated (74%) or upheld (73%)
- Those who had visited the SPSO offices (73%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (67%)

- Male complainants (66%)
- Those aged 65+ (65%)

Extent to which service met expectations – changes over time

Complainants first notifying the SPSO of their complaint in the last year are more likely to agree that the service met expectations than those first contacting the SPSO in 2004/5 (30% and 18% respectively).

Fig 10.2: Thinking back to what you wanted the SPSO to do for you when you first contacted them, to what extent would you agree or disagree that their service met your original expectations?



Base: All respondents: 2004/5 (148); 2006 (290); 2007 (188)

10.2 Communication methods used

Most of the communication from the SPSO is in writing. Complainants were asked whether they thought the use of an additional method of communication would improve the SPSO’s day-to-day communication about complaints. Opinion was divided, with 50% stating yes and 50% stating no.

Looking at the data in closer detail revealed that those within the following sub-groups were most likely to say yes:

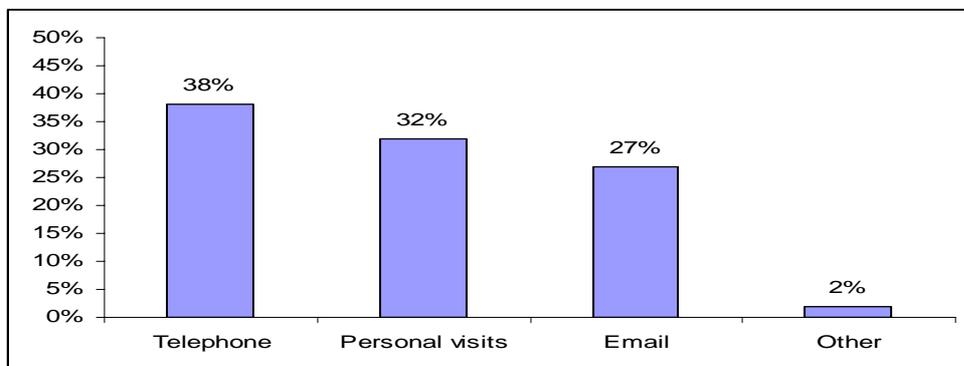
- Those aged 25-44 (61%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (59%)
- Those who first contacted the SPSO by telephone (59%)
- Those who were not directed to other organisations by the SPSO following the outcome of their complaint (58%)
- Those with a disability (57%)

By contrast, those in the following sub-groups were identified as being most likely to feel that an additional method would not bring any improvement to the SPSO’s day-to-day communications concerning complaints:

- Those aged 65+ (60%)
- Those where the SPSO had met their original expectations (59%)

Those who felt that the process would benefit from additional methods of communication being made available were asked to state what other means of communication they would most like to see used. As Fig 10.2 shows, telephone was the most popular option (38%), then personal visits (32%) and email (27%).

Fig 10.2: What other methods of communication would you like to see used?



Base: All respondents identifying an additional method excluding don't knows (325)

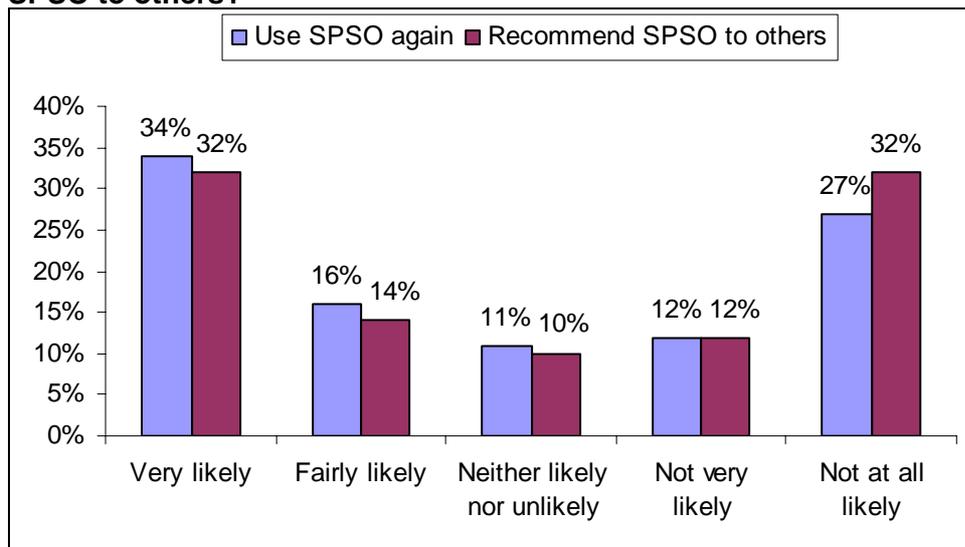
10.3 Future use of the SPSO

All complainants were asked, based on the service they had received from the SPSO, not the outcome of their complaint, how likely would they be to use the SPSO again as well as recommend the SPSO to others.

Fig 10.3 shows, fifty one percent stated that they would be likely to use the SPSO again, with 39% stating that they would be unlikely. A smaller proportion (46%) stated that they would be likely to recommend the SPSO to others, with 44% stating that they would not be likely.

It is interesting to note that likelihood to use the SPSO in the future differs by when the complaint was made with those making a complaint in 2007 more likely to say they would use the service again (57%) than those who made their complaint in 2005 (42%).

Fig 10.3: How likely would you be to use the SPSO again / recommend the SPSO to others?



Base: All respondents excluding don't knows

Looking at how likely complainants felt it was that they would use the SPSO again in the future, it was found that those in the following sub-groups most commonly said that it was **likely they would use the SPSO again**:

- Those who had had their complaint fully (80%) or partially (68%) upheld
- Those who heard first about the SPSO via a leaflet (58%)
- Female complainants (57%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2007 (57%)
- Those aged 65+ (55%)

By contrast, those in the following sub-groups were identified as **least likely** to say that they would consider using the SPSO again:

- Those whose complaint was either not investigated (38%) or not upheld (40%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (42%)
- Those who had first contacted the SPSO via email (43%)
- Those aged 25-44 (44%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (45%)
- Male complainants (46%)

Similarly, complainants within the following sub-groups could be identified as being **most likely to state that they would recommend the SPSO** to others:

- Those who had had their complaint fully (78%) or partially (66%) upheld
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2007 (53%)
- Female complainants (52%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via a leaflet (53%)

Whereas those within the following sub-groups were **least likely to state that they would recommend the SPSO** to others:

- Those whose complaint was either not upheld (35%) or not investigated (35%)
- Those who had first notified the SPSO of their complaint in 2005 (36%)
- Those aged 25-44 (38%)
- Male complainants (41%)
- Those who had first heard of the SPSO via the internet (43%)

10.4 General comments

Finally, all complainants were given the opportunity to tell the SPSO more about the areas of service they thought were working well and those areas where they felt the SPSO needed to improve.

As we can see by looking at Fig 10.4, excessive time being taken to deal with complaints (13%) and the suggestion that the SPSO did not properly investigate the complainant's case (13%) were the two comments made most frequently.

A similar proportion described the SPSO as incompetent and a waste of time (12%). However on a more positive note, nine percent said that they were very satisfied with the service they had received from the SPSO.

Fig 10.4: What areas work well or need to be improved?

Comment	%
Excessive time taken to deal with complaint	13%
SPSO did not investigate properly / look into fully	13%
Total disgrace / would never use again / complete waste of time / incompetent	12%
Very satisfied / completely satisfied	9%
Investigation was biased / public have no chance / never on complainants side	8%
SPSO was no help / not interested / favoured the Council / there to fool the public	7%
Home visits needed / need personal meetings	7%
Other	7%
Limited powers / lack of power to do anything / need more power	6%
Improve communication skills	5%
Very poor service / service badly structured	4%
Staff not knowledgeable / unqualified staff	4%
Stop avoiding/ignoring complaints / questions / issues / trying to diffuse the situation	4%
No follow-up / no correspondence of next stage	4%
Nothing happened / not outcome / still no explanation	4%
Waste of public funding	4%
SPSO did nothing / did not take on the case	4%
Complaints not dealt with / unfairly dealt with	4%
Attempt to understand complaints / grasp the situation	3%
Time taken to consider complaint	3%
Very poor/weak reasons for not investigating / upholding complaint / dismissed without adequate explanation	3%
SPSO afraid to deal with Council / will not take on Council / Council always wins	3%
Attitude / aggressive / rude / barely civil	3%
Read all the information that is given/sent / they do not deal with all the info/issues	3%
Keep complainants advised on progress	3%
Wrong advice given	2%
Quicker response to complaints / correspondence / letters sent	2%
Professional representatives needed to assist public / deal with professionally	2%

Comment	%
Not helpful / unhelpful / no support given	2%
Lack of cooperation	2%
Very dissatisfied	2%
A cover up	2%
Investigation poor / fragmented / spasmodic	1%
Decision based on Council's say	1%
SPSO exists only as a pretence / there is no complaint rights	1%
Politically motivated	1%
Can never get to speak to anyone / get in touch with person / difficult to get hold of	1%

Base: All respondents making a comment (503)