

REPORT TO: TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD – 17 JUNE 2013

REPORT ON: COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

REPORT BY: ASSESSOR

REPORT NO: TVJB 13-2013

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise the Board of guidance from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman on the implementation of a model Complaints Handling Procedure and to recommend implementation of the procedure.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Board:-

- a approves the implementation of the model Complaints Handling Procedure,
- b approves the Guide for Customers, as detailed in Appendix 1, and
- c approves the Guide for Staff, as detailed in Appendix 2

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The cost of implementation will be contained within the approved Revenue budget.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment. There are no major issues.

5 BACKGROUND

5.1 The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 gave the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) the authority to lead the development of model complaints handling procedures (CHP) across the public sector.

5.2 The purpose of the model CHP is to provide a standardised approach to dealing with customer complaints. In particular, the aim is to implement a consistent process for customers to follow which makes it simpler to complain, ensures that staff and customers have confidence in complaints handling and encourages organisations to make the best use of lessons learned from complaints.

5.3 Representatives of the Scottish Assessors' Association met with the Ombudsman in an effort to agree a standard format that would apply to all Assessors. An agreed format emerged, which broadly follows the procedures already adopted by Local Authorities in Scotland.

5.4 The Complaints Handling Procedures are detailed in the appendices to this report. Appendix 1 provides guidance for customers. Appendix 2 provides guidance for staff.

- 5.5 The key differences from the current procedure are a change from a three-stage to a two-stage complaints process, more rigorous recording of complaints and more systematic recording of lessons learned from complaints.
- 5.6 Recoding systems have been reviewed in order to manage the new requirements.
- 5.7 Appropriate training will be provided to staff.
- 5.8 The Assessor will provide a summary of complaints received in his annual Performance Reports.

6 **CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The Clerk and Treasurer to the Board have been consulted on this report.

7 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 'The Local Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure – Guide to Implementation' published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Standard guidance for customers and staff on complaints published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman,

John M Galbraith FRICS
Assessor

17 June 2013

TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

A Guide for Customers

Tayside Valuation Joint Board is committed to providing high-quality customer services.

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us.

This guide describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Joint Board.

What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- 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 a Non-Domestic Rates appeal or a Council Tax proposal) to resolve the matter
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' enquiries 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

The list only shows examples and does not cover everything which you may complain about.

What can't I complain about?

There are some things we cannot deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include things that are covered by a right of appeal: for example if you think your house is incorrectly banded for Council Tax you can make a proposal to the Assessor to alter the Council Tax Band

A complaint is **not**:

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for compensation
- 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

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

Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service. Please also read the section on 'Getting help to make your complaint'.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person at any of our offices, by phone, in writing or by email.

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to us. So please talk to a member of our staff. Then they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

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.

Any complaint should be addressed to the Assessor, Tayside Valuation Joint Board at the office about which you want to complain. The addresses are shown below.

Dundee Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Whitehall House 35 Yeaman Shore DUNDEE DD1 4BU Tel: 01382 221177 Fax: 01382 315600 Email: dundee@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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Angus Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Ravenswood New Road FORFAR DD8 2ZA Tel: 01307 462416 Fax: 01307 468631 Email: angus@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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Perth & Kinross Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Robertson House Whitefriars Crescent PERTH PH2 0LG Tel: 01738 630303 Fax: 01738 639753 Email: perth@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

Our complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage one: **frontline resolution**

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances. If we cannot 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. You may choose to do this immediately or sometime after you get our initial decision.

Stage two: **investigation**

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for
- give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and usually within 20 working days.

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?

After we have fully investigated, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO **cannot** normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure (**so please make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO**)
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court.

You can contact the SPSO:

In person: SPSO
4 Melville Street
EDINBURGH
EH3 7NS

By Post: SPSO
Freepost EH641
EDINBURGH
EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk
Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

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

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help customers access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing please, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, tell us in person, contact us on **01382 221177** or email us at **dundee@tayside-vjb.gov.uk**.

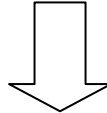
We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as **large print**, audio and Braille).

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints Procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

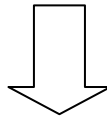
We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.



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.

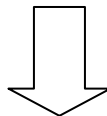


Stage 2: investigation

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 (SPSO)

If after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

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

TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

A Guide for Staff

Foreword

This Complaints Handling Procedure reflects Tayside Valuation Joint Board's commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of customer complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.

The procedure has been developed using the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman's (SPSO) Local Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure. This procedure aims to help us 'get it right first time'. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, 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.

Resolving complaints early saves money and creates better customer relations. Sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery as possible means we can deal with them locally and quickly, so they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure. Complaints that we do not resolve swiftly can greatly add to our workload.

The complaints handling procedure will help us do our job better, improve relationships with our customers and enhance public perception of Tayside Valuation Joint Board. It will help us keep the customer at the heart of the process, while enabling us to better understand how to improve our services by learning from complaints.

*John M Galbraith
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer*

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1 Introduction

In carrying out duties Tayside Valuation Joint Board is answerable to every individual ratepayer, taxpayer and elector and there are established statutory mechanisms for members of the public to challenge the Assessor's actions and lodge appeals against the entries in the Valuation Roll, Valuation List and Electoral Register.

There are no provisions in statute however for complaints about how staff carry out their duties. This Complaints Handling Procedure is therefore in place for any member of the public who, whilst conducting business with Tayside Valuation Joint Board, is dissatisfied with the manner or conduct of the Assessor's staff or in the service they have received.

The Aims and Objectives of Tayside Valuation Joint Board include a commitment to:

- Consult stakeholders about their needs and expectations
- Treat all stakeholders in a fair, consistent manner and in accordance with equal opportunities requirements
- Monitor performance levels
- Strive for continuous improvement in all aspects of service delivery
- Ensure that we are accountable to all stakeholders

All business conducted by the Joint Board staff will be transacted in a polite and efficient manner as well as in line with the law relating to the Local Government functions undertaken by the Assessor. In the field of local taxation it is not always possible to bring about the outcome desired by the public, however, all cases will be dealt with fairly, knowledgeably and courteously.

If after conducting business with the Assessor's office any member of the public is dissatisfied with the service they have received and wishes to make a complaint they may do so at any of our offices, by phone, in writing or by email. Assistance is provided to customers in a Complaints Handling Procedure – Guide to Customers document available on the internet.

The Complaints Handling Procedure:

- Confirms our commitments to customer focus and stakeholder consultation, allowing service users to inform us when we fail to meet acceptable standards of practice, procedure or their expectation of service provision.
- Will provide information to help improve service provision and identify training needs.
- Will highlight instances of bias, discrimination or unhelpfulness.
- Satisfies the requirement to ensure accountability in matters of practice and procedure.
- Recognises the Ombudsman's view that "good complaint handling should be integral to high quality delivery of public service".

This Procedure covers:

- The definition of a "Complaint"
- The stages of the Comments & Complaints Process
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Co-ordination, monitoring and reporting arrangements

2 How to use this Model Complaints Handling Procedure

This document explains to staff how to handle complaints. Another document provides information for customers on the complaints procedure. Together, these form our complaints handling procedure (CHP).

The document contains references and links to more details on parts of the procedure, such as how to record complaints, and the criteria for signing off and agreeing time extensions. These explain how to process, manage and reach decisions on different types of complaints.

When using this document, please also refer to the 'SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles' and best practice guidance on complaints handling from the Complaints Standards Authority at the SPSO which is available at www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk

3 What is a Complaint?

Tayside 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 a Non – Domestic Rates appeal or a Council Tax proposal) to resolve the matter
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' enquiries 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

The list only shows examples and does not cover everything type of complaint which may be received.

Appendix 1 provides a range of examples of complaints we may receive, and how these may be handled.

A complaint is **not**:

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for compensation
- 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

You must not treat these issues as complaints, and should instead direct customers to use the appropriate procedures.

Appendix 2 gives more examples of 'what is not a complaint' and how to direct customers properly.

3.1 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 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. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by the Assessor & ERO or his Depute.

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 system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

3.2 What if the customer doesn't want to complain?

If a customer has expressed dissatisfaction in line with our definition of a complaint but does not want to complain, tell them that we do consider all expressions of dissatisfaction, and that complaints offer us the opportunity to improve services where things have gone wrong. Encourage the customer to submit their complaint and allow us to deal with it through the Complaints Handling Procedure. This will ensure that the customer is updated on the action taken and gets a response to their complaint.

If, however, the customer insists they do not wish to complain, record the issue as an anonymous complaint. This will ensure that the customer's details are not recorded on the complaints database and that they receive no further contact about the matter. It will also help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data recorded and will still allow us to fully consider the matter and take corrective action where appropriate.

3.3 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 will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.

3.4 Complaints involving more than one service or organisation

If a complaint relates to the actions of both the Joint Board and one or more local authority services, you must tell the customer who will take the lead in dealing with the complaint, and explain that we may only be able to provide a response in respect of the actions of the Joint Board.

If a customer complains to the Joint Board about the service of another local authority, agency or public service provider, but the Joint Board has no involvement in the issue, the customer should be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly. However, where, a complaint relates to the Joint Board service and the service of another agency or public service provider, (for example a housing association or a government department), and the Joint Board has a direct interest in the issue, you must handle the complaint about the Joint Board through the CHP. If you need to make enquiries to a local authority or an outside agency in relation to the complaint always take account of data protection legislation and our guidance on handling our customer's personal information. The Information Commissioner has detailed guidance on data sharing and has issued a data sharing code of practice.

Such complaints may include:

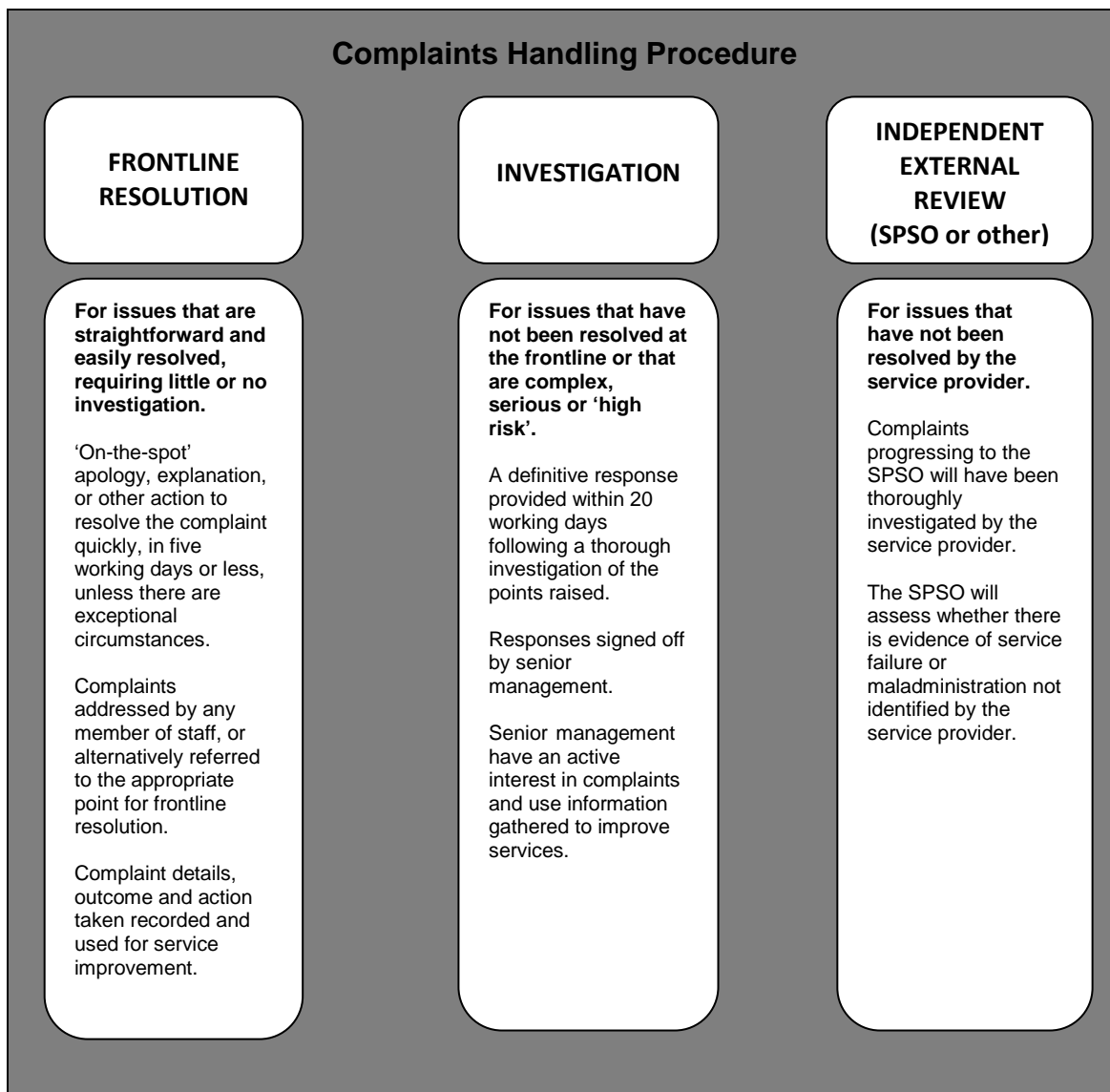
- a complaint made to us about a delay in issuing a Council Tax bill, where the customer's dissatisfaction relates to the service we have provided and the service the billing authority has provided

4 The Complaints Handling Process

The Joint Board's Complaints Handling procedure 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:

- 1 **Frontline resolution**, and
- 2 **Investigation**



For clarity, the term 'frontline resolution' refers to the first stage of the complaints process. It does not reflect any job description within the Joint Board but means seeking to resolve complaints **at the initial point of contact where possible.**

4.1 Stage one: Frontline resolution

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

The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and **as close to the point of service delivery as possible.** This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer, or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint.

Appendix 1 gives examples of the types of complaint we may consider at this stage, with suggestions on how to resolve them.

In practice, frontline resolution means resolving the complaint at the first point of contact with the customer, either by the member of staff receiving the complaint or other identified staff.

In either case, you may settle the complaint by providing an on-the-spot apology where appropriate, or explaining why the issue occurred and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again. You may also explain that, as an organisation that values complaints, we may use the information when we review service standards in the future.

A customer can make a complaint in writing, in person, by telephone, by email or online, or by having someone complain on their behalf. **You must always consider frontline resolution**, regardless of how you have received the customer's complaint.

4.1.1 What to do when you receive a complaint

- 1 On receiving a complaint, you must first decide whether the issue can indeed be defined as a complaint. The customer may express dissatisfaction about more than one issue. This may mean you treat one element as a complaint, while directing the customer to pursue another element through an alternative route (see Appendix 2).
- 2 If you have received and identified a complaint, record the details on our complaints system (see Appendix 5).
- 3 Next, decide whether or not the complaint is suitable for frontline resolution. Some complaints will need to be fully investigated before you can give the customer a suitable response. You must escalate these complaints immediately to the investigation stage.
- 4 Where you think frontline resolution is appropriate, you must consider four key questions:
 - What exactly is the customer's complaint (or complaints)?
 - What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?
 - Can I achieve this, or explain why not?
 - If I can't resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

What exactly is the customer's complaint (or complaints)?

It is important to be clear about exactly what the customer is complaining. You may need to ask the customer supplementary questions to get a full picture.

What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?

At the outset, clarify the outcome the customer wants. Of course, the customer may not be clear about this, so you may need to probe further to find out what they expect and whether they can be satisfied.

Can I achieve this, or explain why not?

If you can achieve the expected outcome by providing an on-the-spot apology or explain why you cannot achieve it, you should do so. If you consider an apology is suitable, you may wish to follow the SPSO's guidance on the subject:

The customer may expect more than we can provide. If the customer's expectations appear to exceed what the organisation can reasonably provide, you must tell them as soon as possible in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes. An example would be where the customer is seeking exemption from rates payments.

You are likely to have to convey the decision face to face or on the telephone. If you do so face to face, by telephone or by email, you are not required to write to the customer as well, although you may choose to do so. It is important, however, to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and passed to the customer.

If I can't resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

If you cannot deal with the complaint because, for example, you are unfamiliar with the issues or area of service involved, pass details of the complaint to someone who can try to resolve it.

4.1.2 Timelines

Complaints will be acknowledged in two working days. Frontline resolution must be completed **within five working days**, although in practice we would often expect to resolve the complaint sooner.

You may need to get more information from other departments to resolve the complaint at this stage. However, it is important to respond to the customer **within five working days**, either resolving the matter or explaining that the Joint Board will investigate their complaint.

4.1.3 Extension to the timeline

In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, you may agree an extension of no more than five working days with the customer. This must only happen when an extension will make it more likely that the complaint will be resolved at the frontline resolution stage.

When you ask for an extension, you must get authorisation from a member of the management team, who will decide whether you need an extension to effectively resolve the complaint. Examples of when this may be appropriate include relevant staff being temporarily unavailable. If, however, the issues are so complex that they cannot be resolved in five days, it may be more appropriate to escalate the complaint straight to the investigation stage. You must tell the customer about the reasons for the delay, and when they can expect your response.

If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, a member of the management team must decide on the extension. You must then tell the customer about the delay and explain the reason for the decision to grant the extension.

It is important that such extensions do not become the norm. Rather, the timeline at the frontline resolution stage should be extended only rarely. All attempts to resolve the complaint at this stage must take no longer than **ten working days** from the date you receive the complaint.

The proportion of complaints that exceed the five-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics must go to the management team on a regular basis.

Appendix 3 provides further information on timelines.

4.1.4 Closing the complaint at the frontline resolution stage

When you have informed the customer of the outcome, you are not obliged to write to them, although you may choose to do so. You must ensure that our response to the complaint addresses all areas that we are responsible for and explains the reasons for our decision. It is also important to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and given to the customer. The complaint should then be closed and the complaints system updated accordingly.

4.1.5 When to escalate to the investigation stage

You must escalate a complaint to the investigation stage when:

- you tried frontline resolution but the customer remains dissatisfied and requests an investigation. This may happen immediately when you communicate the decision at the frontline stage, or some time later
- the customer refuses to take part in frontline resolution
- the issues raised are complex and require detailed investigation
- the complaint relates to serious, high-risk or high-profile issues.

When a previously closed complaint is escalated from the frontline resolution stage, the complaint should be reopened on the complaints system.

Take particular care to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high risk or high profile, as these may require particular action or raise critical issues that need senior management's direct input. The SPSO defines potential high-risk or high-profile complaints as those that may:

- involve a death or terminal illness
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in providing, or repeated failures to provide, a service
- generate significant and ongoing press interest
- pose a serious risk to an organisation's operations
- present issues of a highly sensitive nature, for example concerning:
 - homelessness
 - a particularly vulnerable person
 - child protection
 - personal data

4.2 Stage two: Investigation

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Complaints handled at the investigation stage of the complaints Handling Procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination before we can state our position. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing immediate investigation.

An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our final position.

Investigations should be completed by a member of the management team who was not involved in the frontline resolution stage

4.2.1 What to do when you receive a complaint for investigation

It is important to be clear from the start of the investigation stage exactly what you are investigating, and to ensure that both the customer and the service understand the investigation's scope.

It may be helpful to discuss and confirm these points with the customer at the outset, to establish why they are dissatisfied and whether the outcome they are looking for sounds realistic. In discussing the complaint with the customer, consider three key questions:

- What specifically is the customer's complaint or complaints?
- What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?
- Are the customer's expectations realistic and achievable?

It may be that the customer expects more than we can provide. If so, you must make this clear to them as soon as possible.

Where possible you should also clarify what additional information you will need to investigate the complaint. The customer may need to provide more evidence to help us reach a decision.

Details of the complaint must be recorded on the system for recording complaints. Where appropriate, this will be done as a continuation of frontline resolution. The details must be updated when the investigation ends.

If the investigation stage follows attempted frontline resolution, you must hand over all case notes and associated information to the officer responsible for the investigation, and record that you have done so.

4.2.2 Timelines

The following deadlines are appropriate to cases at the investigation stage:

- complaints must be acknowledged within **three working days**
- you should provide a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but not later than **20 working days** from the time you received the complaint for investigation.

4.2.3 Extension to the timeline

Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline. For example, some complaints are so complex that they require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20-day limit. However, these would be the exception and you must always try to deliver a final response to a complaint within 20 working days.

If there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, a member of the management team will set time limits on any extended investigation, as long as the customer agrees. You must keep the customer updated on the reason for the delay and give them a revised timescale for completion. If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management must consider and confirm the extension. The reasons for an extension might include the following:

- Essential accounts or statements, crucial to establishing the circumstances of the case, are needed from staff, customers or others but they cannot help because of long-term sickness or leave.
- You cannot obtain further essential information within normal timescales.
- Operations are disrupted by unforeseen or unavoidable operational circumstances, for example industrial action or severe weather conditions.
- The customer has agreed to mediation as a potential route for resolution.

These are only a few examples, and you must judge the matter in relation to each complaint. However, an extension would be the exception and you must always try to deliver a final response to the complaint within 20 working days.

As with complaints considered at the frontline stage, the proportion of complaints that exceed the 20-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics must go to the management team on a regular basis.

Appendix 3 provides further information on timelines.

4.2.4 Mediation

Some complex complaints, or complaints where customers and other interested parties have become entrenched in their position, may require a different approach to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, you may consider using services such as mediation or conciliation using suitably trained and qualified mediators to try to resolve the matter and to reduce the risk of the complaint escalating further.

Mediation will help both parties to understand what has caused the complaint, and so is more likely to lead to mutually satisfactory solutions.

If you and the customer agree to mediation, revised timescales will need to be agreed.

4.2.5 Closing the complaint at the investigation stage

You must let the customer know the outcome of the investigation, in writing or by their preferred method of contact. Our response to the complaint must address all areas that we are responsible for and explain the reasons for our decision. You must record the decision, and details of how it was communicated to the customer, on the system for recording complaints. You must also make clear to the customer:

- their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint
- the time limit for doing so, and
- how to contact the SPSO.

4.2.6 Independent external review

Once the investigation stage has been completed, the customer has the right to approach the SPSO if they remain dissatisfied.

The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of our complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failures and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way we have handled the complaint.

The SPSO recommends that you use the wording below to inform customers of their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint. The SPSO also provides a leaflet, ***The Ombudsman and your organisation***, which you may find helpful in deciding how and when to refer someone to the SPSO.

SPSO Recommended Wording:

“Information about the SPSO

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about the Scottish Government, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, agencies and other government sponsored organisations. If you remain dissatisfied with an organisation after its complaints process, you can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where you have not gone all the way through the organisation’s complaints handling procedure
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about, or
- that have been or are being considered in court.”

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
4 Melville Street
EDINBURGH
EH3 7NS

SPSO
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk
Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

5 Governance of the Complaints Handling procedure

5.1 Roles and responsibilities

Overall responsibility and accountability for the management of complaints lies with the Assessor and ERO and the management team.

Our final position on the complaint must be signed off by a member of the management team and we will confirm that this is our final response. This ensures that the management team own and are accountable for the decision. It also reassures the customer that their concerns have been taken seriously.

The following paragraphs identify the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to the Complaints Handling Procedure

Assessor & ERO: The Assessor and ERO provides leadership and direction in ways that guide and enable us to perform effectively across all services. This includes ensuring that there is an effective Complaints Handling Procedure, with a robust investigation process that demonstrates how we learn from the complaints we receive.

The Assessor and ERO (or Depute Assessor and ERO in the case of absence) may take a personal interest in all or some complaints, or may delegate responsibility for the Complaint Handling Procedure to senior staff. Regular management reports assure the Assessor and ERO of the quality of complaints performance.

Management Team : On the Assessor and ERO's behalf, the management team will be responsible for:

- managing complaints and the way we learn from them
- overseeing the implementation of actions required as a result of a complaint
- investigating complaints
- deputising for the Assessor and ERO on occasion

However, the management team may decide to delegate some elements of complaints handling (such as investigations and the drafting of response letters) to other senior staff. Where this happens, the management team should retain ownership and accountability for the management and reporting of complaints. Members of the management team may also be responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers, so they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete and their response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

Complaints investigator: The complaints investigator is responsible and accountable for the management of the investigation. They will be involved in the investigation and in co-ordinating all aspects of the response to the customer. This may include preparing a comprehensive written report, including details of any procedural changes in service delivery that could result in wider opportunities for learning.

Administration Manager Finance/Personnel: He/she will be responsible for maintaining a record of all complaints received and for reporting on the progress of, and outcomes from, all complaints to the Management Team.

All staff: A complaint may be made to any member of staff in the Joint Board. Therefore all staff must be aware of the Complaints Handling Procedure and how to handle and record complaints at the frontline stage. They should also be aware of who to refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to handle the matter personally. **All staff are encouraged to try to resolve complaints early, as close to the point of service delivery as possible, and quickly to prevent escalation.**

5.2 Complaints about senior staff

Complaints about senior staff can be difficult to handle, as there may be a conflict of interest for the staff investigating the complaint. When serious complaints are raised against senior staff, it is particularly important that the investigation is conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation.

If the complaint is an internal one it may be more appropriate to refer to the Joint Board's "Grievance Procedure" or "Harassment at Work Policy".

5.3 Recording, reporting, learning and publicising

Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. One of the aims of the Complaints Handling Procedure is to identify opportunities to improve services provided by Tayside Valuation Joint Board. We must record all complaints in a systematic way so that we can use the complaints data for analysis and management reporting. By recording and using complaints information in this way, we can identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify training opportunities and introduce service improvements.

5.3.1 Recording complaints

To collect suitable data we must record all complaints in line with SPSO minimum requirements, as follows:

- the customer's name and address
- the date the complaint was received
- the nature of the complaint
- how the complaint was received
- the service the complaint refers to the date the complaint was closed at the frontline resolution stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was escalated to the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- action taken at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the outcome of the complaint at each stage
- the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken.

We have structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action. These provide a detailed record of services that have failed to satisfy customers. Appendix 5 contains guidance on the logging and recording of complaints.

5.3.2 Reporting of complaints

Complaints details are analysed for trend information to ensure we identify service failures and take appropriate action. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of where services need to improve.

We publish on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response. This demonstrates the improvements resulting from complaints and shows that complaints can influence our services. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and will help our customers see that we value their complaints.

We will:

- publicise on a quarterly basis complaints outcomes, trends and actions taken
- use case studies and examples to show how complaints have helped improve services.

This information should be reported regularly (and at least quarterly) to the management team.

5.3.3 Learning from complaints

At the earliest opportunity after the closure of the complaint, the complaints handler should always make sure that the customer and staff of the department involved understand the findings of the investigation and any recommendations made.

The management team will review the information gathered from complaints regularly and consider whether our services could be improved or internal policies and procedures updated.

As a minimum, we will:

- use complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints
- take action to reduce the risk of recurrence
- record the details of corrective action in the complaints file, and
- systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery.

Where we have identified the need for service improvement:

- the action needed to improve services must be authorised
- an officer (or team) should be designated the 'owner' of the issue, with responsibility for ensuring the action is taken
- a target date must be set for the action to be taken
- the designated individual must follow up to ensure that the action is taken within the agreed timescale
- where appropriate, performance in the service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved
- we must ensure that staff learn from complaints.

5.3.4 Publicising complaints performance information

We also report on our performance in handling complaints annually in line with SPSO requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volumes and types of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

5.4 Maintaining confidentiality

Confidentiality is important in complaints handling. It includes maintaining the customer's confidentiality and explaining to them the importance of confidentiality generally. We must always bear in mind legal requirements, for example, data protection legislation, as well as internal policies on confidentiality and the use of customers' information.

5.5 Managing unacceptable behaviour

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The circumstances leading to a complaint may result in the customer acting in an unacceptable way. Customers who have a history of challenging or inappropriate behaviour, or have difficulty expressing themselves, may still have a legitimate grievance.

A customer's reasons for complaining may contribute to the way in which they present their complaint. Regardless of this, we must treat all complaints seriously and properly assess them. However, we also recognise that the actions of customers who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on time and resources or unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. We will, therefore, apply our policies and procedures to protect staff from unacceptable behaviour such as unreasonable persistence, threats or offensive behaviour from customers.

5.6 Supporting the customer

All members of the community have the right to equal access to our Complaints Handling Procedure. Customers who do not have English as a first language may need help with interpretation and translation services, and other customers may have specific needs that we will seek to address to ensure easy access to the Complaints Handling Procedure.

We must always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality. This includes making reasonable adjustments to our service to help the customer where appropriate. Support and advocacy groups, noted in this document, are available to support customers in pursuing a complaint and customers should be directed to these as appropriate. Staff should particularly note that the Joint Board subscribes to a language translation service.

5.7 Time limit for making complaints

This Complaints Handling Procedure sets a time limit of six months from when the customer first knew of the problem, within which time they may ask us to consider the complaint, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

We will apply this time limit with discretion. In decision making we will take account of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (Section 10(1)), which sets out the time limit within which a member of the public can normally ask the SPSO to consider complaints. The limit is one year from when the person first knew of the problem they are complaining about, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

If it is clear that a decision not to investigate a customer's complaint will lead to a request for external review of the matter, we may decide that this satisfies the special circumstances criteria. This will enable us to consider the complaint and try to resolve it.

Complaints

The following tables give examples of complaints that may be considered at the frontline stage, and suggest possible actions to achieve resolution.

Complaint	Possible Action to Resolve Complaint
The customer complains that her application to be registered as an elector has not been dealt with timeously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologise to the customer and resolve the issue by processing the application immediately.
The customer has provided evidence to verify his claim for a reduction in Rateable Value but no response has been provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologise to the customer. • Consider the evidence and respond as a matter of priority and/or in line with the relevant appeal procedures
The customer complains that a member of staff did not attend a pre-arranged meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to the member of staff, or the line manager, to explain the customer's complaint and to agree how to resolve the issue, for example by arranging a new time and date for the meeting. • Explain the reasons for the failed appointment and apologise to the customer.
The customer complains that the quality of advice provided is not satisfactory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the relevant staff involved to review the guidance provided to assess whether or not it is acceptable. • If appropriate, agree that more/better information should be provided • Explain and apologise to the customer. • Obtain a report from the member(s) of staff involved to confirm that further information has been provided to the satisfaction of the customer. • Feedback the lessons learned from the complaint into a service improvement plan.
The customer expresses dissatisfaction in line with the definition of a complaint, but says she does not want to complain – just wants to tell us about the matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the customer that we value complaints because they help to improve services. • Encourage them to submit the complaint. • In terms of improving service delivery and learning from mistakes, it is important the customer feedback, such as this, is recorded, evaluated and acted upon. Therefore, if the customer still insists that they do not want to complain, record the matter as an anonymous complaint. This will avoid breaching the complaints handling procedure. Reassure the customer that they will not be contacted again about the matter.

What is not a complaint

A concern may not necessarily be a complaint. For example, a customer might make a routine first-time request for a service. This is not a complaint, but the issue may escalate into a complaint if it is not handled effectively and the customer has to keep on asking for service.

A customer may also be concerned about matters which have their own specific review or appeal procedures, and, where appropriate, customers must be directed to the relevant procedure. This complaints handling procedure should not, therefore, be used for dealing with customer complaints that are covered by the statutory appeal systems which are listed below:

Non Domestic Rating Valuation	Formal Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessor • Local Valuation Appeal Committee • Lands Tribunal for Scotland • Lands Valuation Appeal Court
Council Tax	Formal Proposal to Assessor Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Valuation Appeal Committee • Court of Session
Electoral Registration	Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral Registration Officer • Sheriff Court
Freedom of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to redress through FOI "Review" process • Appeal to Information Commissioner

Timelines

General

In this procedure, 'day' means a working day. References to timelines throughout the Complaints Handling Procedure relate to working days. When measuring performance against the required timelines, we do not count non-working days, for example weekends, public holidays and days of industrial action where our service has been interrupted.

Timelines at frontline resolution

You must aim to achieve frontline resolution within five working days. The day you receive the complaint is day 1. Where you receive it on a non-working day, for example at the weekend or on a public holiday, day 1 will be the next working day.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Day complaint received by the Joint Board, or next working day if date of receipt is non-working day				Frontline resolution achieved or complain escalated to the investigate stage.

Extension to the five-day timeline

If you have extended the timeline at the frontline resolution stage in line with the procedure, the revised response time must be no longer than 10 working days from the date we receive the complaint.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Day we receive the complaint, or the next working day if the date of receipt is a non-working day.	In a few cases where it is clearly essential to achieve early resolution, you may authorise an extension within five working days from when the complaint was received. You must conclude the frontline resolution stage within 10 working days from the date of receipt, either by resolving the complaint or escalating it to the investigation stage.								Frontline achieved or complaint escalated to the investigation.

Transferring cases from frontline resolution to investigation

If it is clear that frontline resolution has not resolved the matter, and the customer wants to escalate the complaint to the investigation stage, you must pass the case for investigation without delay. In practice this will mean the same day that the customer is told this will happen.

Timelines at investigation

You may consider a complaint at the investigation stage:

- after attempted frontline resolution, or
- immediately on receipt if you believe the matter to be sufficiently complex, serious or appropriate to merit a full investigation from the outset.

Acknowledgement

All complaints considered at the investigation stage must be acknowledged within **three working days** of receipt. The date of receipt is:

- the day the case is transferred from the frontline stage to the investigation stage, where it is clear that the case requires investigation, or
- the day the customer asks for an investigation after a decision at the frontline resolution stage. You should note that a customer may not ask for an investigation immediately after attempts at frontline resolution, or
- the date you receive the complaint, if you think it sufficiently complex, serious or appropriate to merit a full investigation from the outset.

Investigation

You should respond in full to the complaint within **20 working days** of receiving it at the investigation stage.

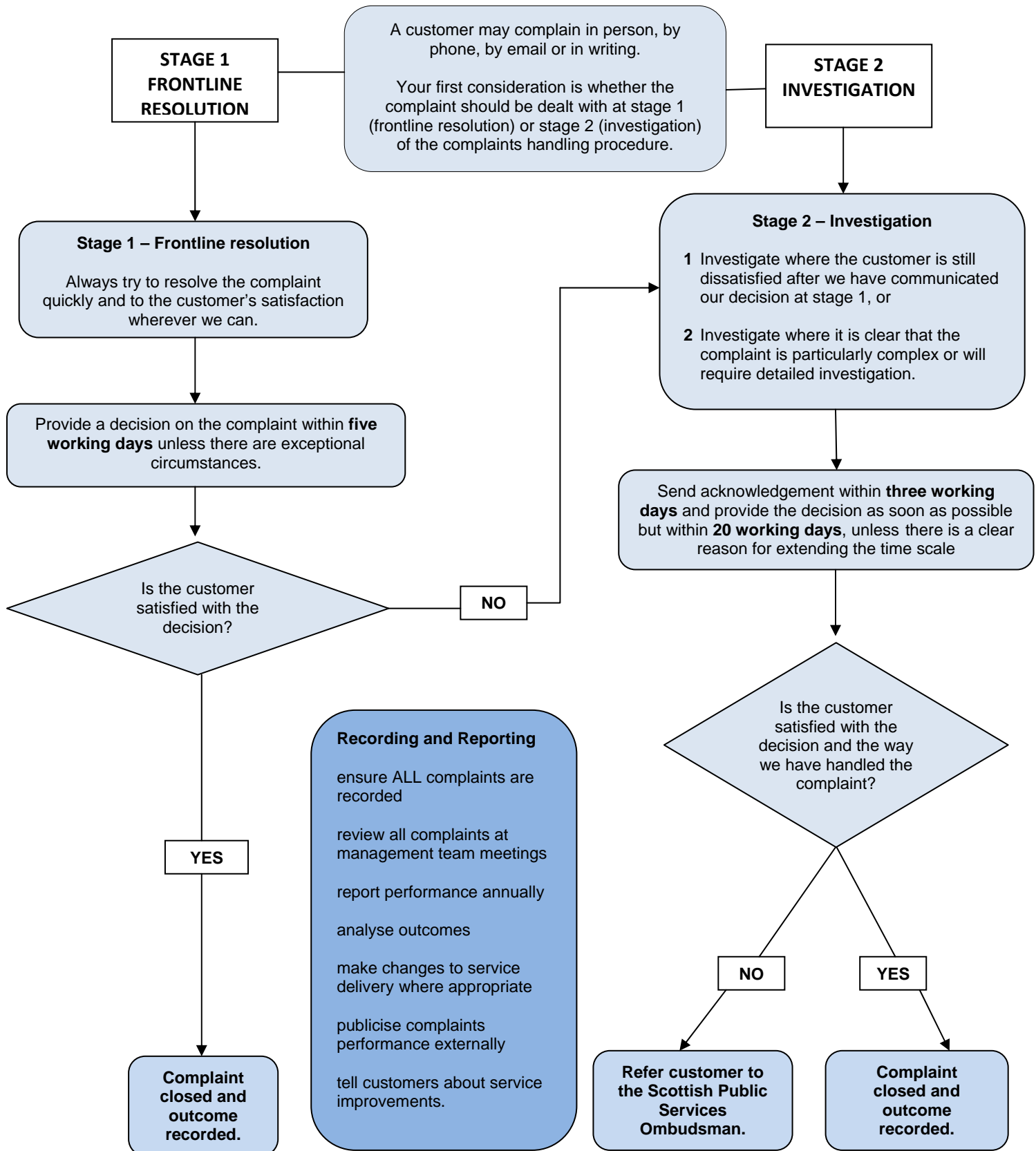
The 20-working day limit allows time for a thorough, proportionate and consistent investigation to arrive at a decision that is objective, evidence-based and fair. This means you have 20 working days to investigate the complaint, regardless of any time taken to consider it at the frontline resolution stage.

Day 1	Day 5	Day 10	Day 15	Day 20
Day complaint received at investigation stage, or next working day if date of receipt is a non-working day. Acknowledgement issued within three working days.				Joint Board's decision issued to customer or agreement reached with customer to extend deadline.

In exceptional circumstances you may need longer than the 20-day limit for a full response. If so, you must explain the reasons to the customer, and agree with them a revised timescale.

Day 1	Day 5	Day 10	Day 15	Day 20	Day 20 +
<p>Day complaint received at investigation stage, or next working day if date of receipt is a non-working day. Acknowledgement issued within three working days.</p>				<p>Joint Board's decision issued to customer or agreement reached with customer to extend deadline.</p>	<p>Issue final decision on the complaint.</p>

The Complaints Handling Procedure



The complaints handling procedure in Tayside Valuation Joint Board

COMPLAINTS LOGGING & RECORDING GUIDANCE

- 1 The recipient of the Complaint should make out a Logging Sheet to include the following:
 - Complainants Name
 - Complainant's Address
 - Complainant's Telephone No(s) and/or E-mail Address
 - Subject/Relevant Address (if different)
 - Date Received
 - How received (ie By mail, e-mail etc)
 - Received by (Name of member of staff)
 - Nature of Complaint
 - Complaint Number

The complaint number should be a simple, consecutive number within each year, which will be obtained by contacting the Administration Manager Finance/Personnel.
- 2 A copy of the Logging & Recording sheet containing the above details should be passed to the Administration Manager and the relevant Line Manager should be informed.
- 3 The person dealing with the complaint should maintain the Logging & Recording Sheet through the Frontline Resolution Stage of the process and pass it to the Investigating Officer if the complaint proceeds to that Stage. The person dealing with the complaint at the Frontline Resolution stage may be the recipient or it may be more appropriate for a Line Manager or other member of staff to deal with the complaint – this will be dependent upon the nature of the complaint.
- 4 Likewise, the Investigating Officer should maintain the Logging & Recording Sheet through the investigation Stage.
- 5 At each significant step forward in the process, the sheet should be updated and a copy passed to the Administration Manager for the Recording Sheet to be updated.
- 6 Any Complaint which is referred to the SPSO should be dealt with by the Assessor & ERO and notified to the Administration Manager on receipt.
- 7 All live Logging & Recording sheets should be referred to the Management Team by the Administration Manager for its regular meetings until the complaint is resolved.
- 8 The Administration Manager will provide the Management Team with regular reports on complaints received and resolved. (See relevant spreadsheet)
- 9 The Assessor will report to the Board and will publish a summary Complaints Report on the Board's web site (www.tvjb-vjb.gov.uk) on an annual basis.

TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

A Guide for Customers

Tayside Valuation Joint Board is committed to providing high-quality customer services.

We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.

If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us.

This guide describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

What is a complaint?

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Joint Board.

What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- 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 a Non-Domestic Rates appeal or a Council Tax proposal) to resolve the matter
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' enquiries 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

The list only shows examples and does not cover everything which you may complain about.

What can't I complain about?

There are some things we cannot deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include things that are covered by a right of appeal: for example if you think your house is incorrectly banded for Council Tax you can make a proposal to the Assessor to alter the Council Tax Band

A complaint is **not**:

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for compensation
- 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

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

Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint to us, including the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service. Please also read the section on 'Getting help to make your complaint'.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person at any of our offices, by phone, in writing or by email.

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to us. So please talk to a member of our staff. Then they can try to resolve any problems on the spot.

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.

Any complaint should be addressed to the Assessor, Tayside Valuation Joint Board at the office about which you want to complain. The addresses are shown below.

Dundee Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Whitehall House 35 Yeaman Shore DUNDEE DD1 4BU Tel: 01382 221177 Fax: 01382 315600 Email: dundee@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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Angus Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Ravenswood New Road FORFAR DD8 2ZA Tel: 01307 462416 Fax: 01307 468631 Email: angus@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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Perth & Kinross Division	Tayside Valuation Joint Board Robertson House Whitefriars Crescent PERTH PH2 0LG Tel: 01738 630303 Fax: 01738 639753 Email: perth@tayside-vjb.gov.uk
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What happens when I have complained?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint.

Our complaints procedure has two stages:

Stage one: **frontline resolution**

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, and immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you our decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances. If we cannot 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. You may choose to do this immediately or sometime after you get our initial decision.

Stage two: **investigation**

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.

When using Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for
- give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and usually within 20 working days.

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?

After we have fully investigated, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO **cannot** normally look at:

- a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure (**so please make sure it has done so before contacting the SPSO**)
- events that happened, or that you became aware of, more than a year ago
- a matter that has been or is being considered in court.

You can contact the SPSO:

In person: SPSO
4 Melville Street
EDINBURGH
EH3 7NS

By Post: SPSO
Freepost EH641
EDINBURGH
EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk
Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance.

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance

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

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help customers access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing please, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, tell us in person, contact us on **01382 221177** or email us at **dundee@tayside-vjb.gov.uk**.

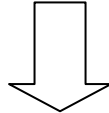
We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as **large print**, audio and Braille).

Quick guide to our complaints procedure

Complaints Procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

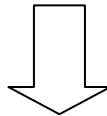
We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need a detailed investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.



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.

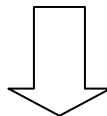


Stage 2: investigation

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 (SPSO)

If after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

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

TAYSIDE VALUATION JOINT BOARD



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

A Guide for Staff

Foreword

This Complaints Handling Procedure reflects Tayside Valuation Joint Board's commitment to valuing complaints. It seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of customer complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the facts of the case.

The procedure has been developed using the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman's (SPSO) Local Authority Model Complaints Handling Procedure. This procedure aims to help us 'get it right first time'. We want quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, 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.

Resolving complaints early saves money and creates better customer relations. Sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery as possible means we can deal with them locally and quickly, so they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure. Complaints that we do not resolve swiftly can greatly add to our workload.

The complaints handling procedure will help us do our job better, improve relationships with our customers and enhance public perception of Tayside Valuation Joint Board. It will help us keep the customer at the heart of the process, while enabling us to better understand how to improve our services by learning from complaints.

*John M Galbraith
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer*

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1 Introduction

In carrying out duties Tayside Valuation Joint Board is answerable to every individual ratepayer, taxpayer and elector and there are established statutory mechanisms for members of the public to challenge the Assessor's actions and lodge appeals against the entries in the Valuation Roll, Valuation List and Electoral Register.

There are no provisions in statute however for complaints about how staff carry out their duties. This Complaints Handling Procedure is therefore in place for any member of the public who, whilst conducting business with Tayside Valuation Joint Board, is dissatisfied with the manner or conduct of the Assessor's staff or in the service they have received.

The Aims and Objectives of Tayside Valuation Joint Board include a commitment to:

- Consult stakeholders about their needs and expectations
- Treat all stakeholders in a fair, consistent manner and in accordance with equal opportunities requirements
- Monitor performance levels
- Strive for continuous improvement in all aspects of service delivery
- Ensure that we are accountable to all stakeholders

All business conducted by the Joint Board staff will be transacted in a polite and efficient manner as well as in line with the law relating to the Local Government functions undertaken by the Assessor. In the field of local taxation it is not always possible to bring about the outcome desired by the public, however, all cases will be dealt with fairly, knowledgeably and courteously.

If after conducting business with the Assessor's office any member of the public is dissatisfied with the service they have received and wishes to make a complaint they may do so at any of our offices, by phone, in writing or by email. Assistance is provided to customers in a Complaints Handling Procedure – Guide to Customers document available on the internet.

The Complaints Handling Procedure:

- Confirms our commitments to customer focus and stakeholder consultation, allowing service users to inform us when we fail to meet acceptable standards of practice, procedure or their expectation of service provision.
- Will provide information to help improve service provision and identify training needs.
- Will highlight instances of bias, discrimination or unhelpfulness.
- Satisfies the requirement to ensure accountability in matters of practice and procedure.
- Recognises the Ombudsman's view that "good complaint handling should be integral to high quality delivery of public service".

This Procedure covers:

- The definition of a "Complaint"
- The stages of the Comments & Complaints Process
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Co-ordination, monitoring and reporting arrangements

2 How to use this Model Complaints Handling Procedure

This document explains to staff how to handle complaints. Another document provides information for customers on the complaints procedure. Together, these form our complaints handling procedure (CHP).

The document contains references and links to more details on parts of the procedure, such as how to record complaints, and the criteria for signing off and agreeing time extensions. These explain how to process, manage and reach decisions on different types of complaints.

When using this document, please also refer to the 'SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles' and best practice guidance on complaints handling from the Complaints Standards Authority at the SPSO which is available at www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk

3 What is a Complaint?

Tayside 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 a Non – Domestic Rates appeal or a Council Tax proposal) to resolve the matter
- The Joint Board's failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- Failure, negligence or delays in responding to customers' enquiries 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

The list only shows examples and does not cover everything type of complaint which may be received.

Appendix 1 provides a range of examples of complaints we may receive, and how these may be handled.

A complaint is **not**:

- a routine first-time request for a service
- a request for compensation
- 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

You must not treat these issues as complaints, and should instead direct customers to use the appropriate procedures.

Appendix 2 gives more examples of 'what is not a complaint' and how to direct customers properly.

3.1 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 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. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by the Assessor & ERO or his Depute.

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 system. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow us to take corrective action where appropriate.

3.2 What if the customer doesn't want to complain?

If a customer has expressed dissatisfaction in line with our definition of a complaint but does not want to complain, tell them that we do consider all expressions of dissatisfaction, and that complaints offer us the opportunity to improve services where things have gone wrong. Encourage the customer to submit their complaint and allow us to deal with it through the Complaints Handling Procedure. This will ensure that the customer is updated on the action taken and gets a response to their complaint.

If, however, the customer insists they do not wish to complain, record the issue as an anonymous complaint. This will ensure that the customer's details are not recorded on the complaints database and that they receive no further contact about the matter. It will also help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data recorded and will still allow us to fully consider the matter and take corrective action where appropriate.

3.3 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 will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.

3.4 Complaints involving more than one service or organisation

If a complaint relates to the actions of both the Joint Board and one or more local authority services, you must tell the customer who will take the lead in dealing with the complaint, and explain that we may only be able to provide a response in respect of the actions of the Joint Board.

If a customer complains to the Joint Board about the service of another local authority, agency or public service provider, but the Joint Board has no involvement in the issue, the customer should be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly. However, where, a complaint relates to the Joint Board service and the service of another agency or public service provider, (for example a housing association or a government department), and the Joint Board has a direct interest in the issue, you must handle the complaint about the Joint Board through the CHP. If you need to make enquiries to a local authority or an outside agency in relation to the complaint always take account of data protection legislation and our guidance on handling our customer's personal information. The Information Commissioner has detailed guidance on data sharing and has issued a data sharing code of practice.

Such complaints may include:

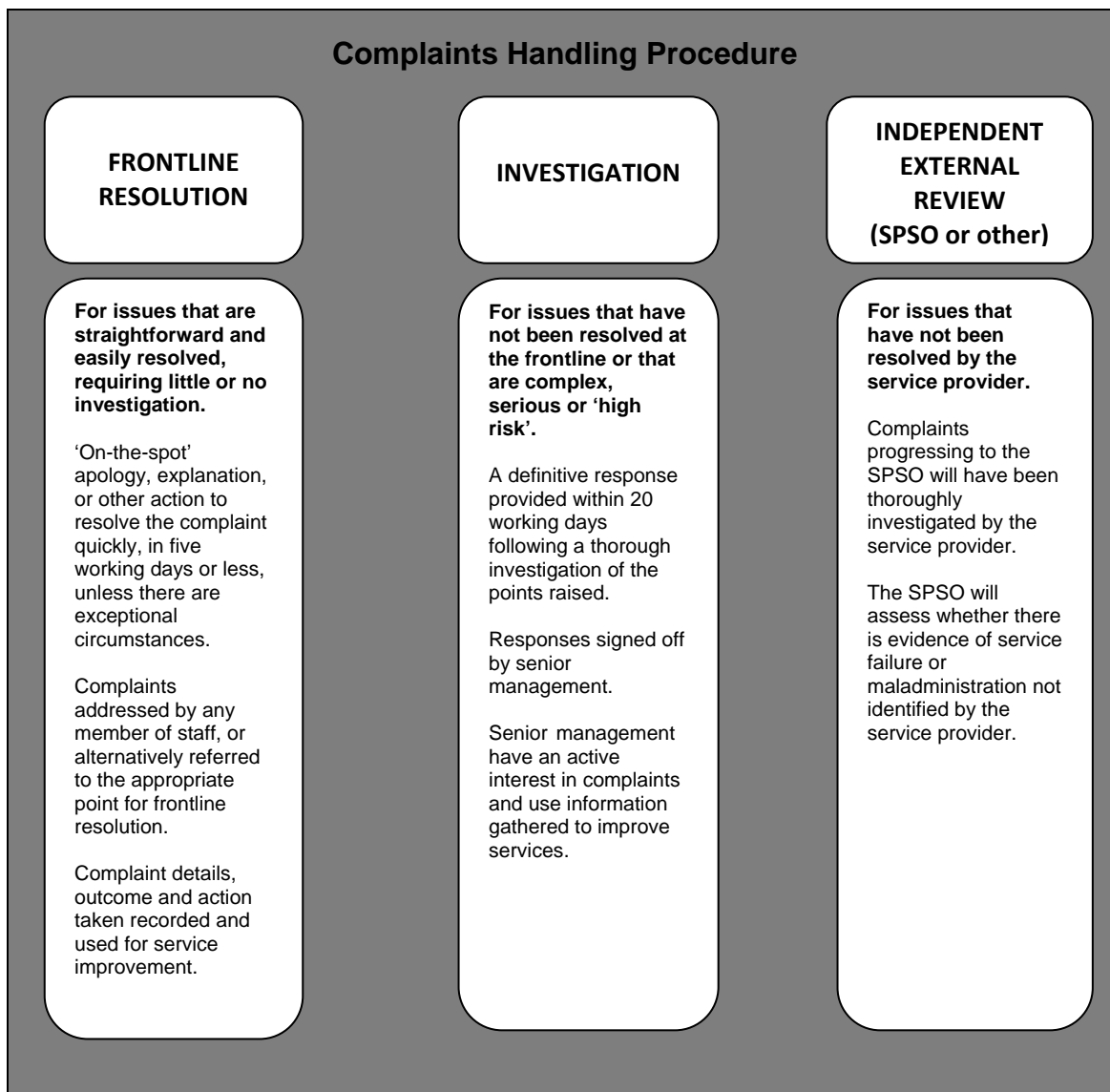
- a complaint made to us about a delay in issuing a Council Tax bill, where the customer's dissatisfaction relates to the service we have provided and the service the billing authority has provided

4 The Complaints Handling Process

The Joint Board's Complaints Handling procedure 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:

- 1 **Frontline resolution, and**
- 2 **Investigation**



For clarity, the term 'frontline resolution' refers to the first stage of the complaints process. It does not reflect any job description within the Joint Board but means seeking to resolve complaints **at the initial point of contact where possible.**

4.1 Stage one: Frontline resolution

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

The main principle is to seek early resolution, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity and **as close to the point of service delivery as possible.** This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer, or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint.

Appendix 1 gives examples of the types of complaint we may consider at this stage, with suggestions on how to resolve them.

In practice, frontline resolution means resolving the complaint at the first point of contact with the customer, either by the member of staff receiving the complaint or other identified staff.

In either case, you may settle the complaint by providing an on-the-spot apology where appropriate, or explaining why the issue occurred and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again. You may also explain that, as an organisation that values complaints, we may use the information when we review service standards in the future.

A customer can make a complaint in writing, in person, by telephone, by email or online, or by having someone complain on their behalf. **You must always consider frontline resolution**, regardless of how you have received the customer's complaint.

4.1.1 What to do when you receive a complaint

- 1 On receiving a complaint, you must first decide whether the issue can indeed be defined as a complaint. The customer may express dissatisfaction about more than one issue. This may mean you treat one element as a complaint, while directing the customer to pursue another element through an alternative route (see Appendix 2).
- 2 If you have received and identified a complaint, record the details on our complaints system (see Appendix 5).
- 3 Next, decide whether or not the complaint is suitable for frontline resolution. Some complaints will need to be fully investigated before you can give the customer a suitable response. You must escalate these complaints immediately to the investigation stage.
- 4 Where you think frontline resolution is appropriate, you must consider four key questions:
 - What exactly is the customer's complaint (or complaints)?
 - What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?
 - Can I achieve this, or explain why not?
 - If I can't resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

What exactly is the customer's complaint (or complaints)?

It is important to be clear about exactly what the customer is complaining. You may need to ask the customer supplementary questions to get a full picture.

What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?

At the outset, clarify the outcome the customer wants. Of course, the customer may not be clear about this, so you may need to probe further to find out what they expect and whether they can be satisfied.

Can I achieve this, or explain why not?

If you can achieve the expected outcome by providing an on-the-spot apology or explain why you cannot achieve it, you should do so. If you consider an apology is suitable, you may wish to follow the SPSO's guidance on the subject:

The customer may expect more than we can provide. If the customer's expectations appear to exceed what the organisation can reasonably provide, you must tell them as soon as possible in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes. An example would be where the customer is seeking exemption from rates payments.

You are likely to have to convey the decision face to face or on the telephone. If you do so face to face, by telephone or by email, you are not required to write to the customer as well, although you may choose to do so. It is important, however, to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and passed to the customer.

If I can't resolve this, who can help with frontline resolution?

If you cannot deal with the complaint because, for example, you are unfamiliar with the issues or area of service involved, pass details of the complaint to someone who can try to resolve it.

4.1.2 Timelines

Complaints will be acknowledged in two working days. Frontline resolution must be completed **within five working days**, although in practice we would often expect to resolve the complaint sooner.

You may need to get more information from other departments to resolve the complaint at this stage. However, it is important to respond to the customer **within five working days**, either resolving the matter or explaining that the Joint Board will investigate their complaint.

4.1.3 Extension to the timeline

In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so, you may agree an extension of no more than five working days with the customer. This must only happen when an extension will make it more likely that the complaint will be resolved at the frontline resolution stage.

When you ask for an extension, you must get authorisation from a member of the management team, who will decide whether you need an extension to effectively resolve the complaint. Examples of when this may be appropriate include relevant staff being temporarily unavailable. If, however, the issues are so complex that they cannot be resolved in five days, it may be more appropriate to escalate the complaint straight to the investigation stage. You must tell the customer about the reasons for the delay, and when they can expect your response.

If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, a member of the management team must decide on the extension. You must then tell the customer about the delay and explain the reason for the decision to grant the extension.

It is important that such extensions do not become the norm. Rather, the timeline at the frontline resolution stage should be extended only rarely. All attempts to resolve the complaint at this stage must take no longer than **ten working days** from the date you receive the complaint.

The proportion of complaints that exceed the five-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics must go to the management team on a regular basis.

Appendix 3 provides further information on timelines.

4.1.4 Closing the complaint at the frontline resolution stage

When you have informed the customer of the outcome, you are not obliged to write to them, although you may choose to do so. You must ensure that our response to the complaint addresses all areas that we are responsible for and explains the reasons for our decision. It is also important to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and given to the customer. The complaint should then be closed and the complaints system updated accordingly.

4.1.5 When to escalate to the investigation stage

You must escalate a complaint to the investigation stage when:

- you tried frontline resolution but the customer remains dissatisfied and requests an investigation. This may happen immediately when you communicate the decision at the frontline stage, or some time later
- the customer refuses to take part in frontline resolution
- the issues raised are complex and require detailed investigation
- the complaint relates to serious, high-risk or high-profile issues.

When a previously closed complaint is escalated from the frontline resolution stage, the complaint should be reopened on the complaints system.

Take particular care to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high risk or high profile, as these may require particular action or raise critical issues that need senior management's direct input. The SPSO defines potential high-risk or high-profile complaints as those that may:

- involve a death or terminal illness
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in providing, or repeated failures to provide, a service
- generate significant and ongoing press interest
- pose a serious risk to an organisation's operations
- present issues of a highly sensitive nature, for example concerning:
 - homelessness
 - a particularly vulnerable person
 - child protection
 - personal data

4.2 Stage two: Investigation

Not all complaints are suitable for frontline resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at this stage. Complaints handled at the investigation stage of the complaints Handling Procedure are typically complex or require a detailed examination before we can state our position. These complaints may already have been considered at the frontline resolution stage, or they may have been identified from the start as needing immediate investigation.

An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our final position.

Investigations should be completed by a member of the management team who was not involved in the frontline resolution stage

4.2.1 What to do when you receive a complaint for investigation

It is important to be clear from the start of the investigation stage exactly what you are investigating, and to ensure that both the customer and the service understand the investigation's scope.

It may be helpful to discuss and confirm these points with the customer at the outset, to establish why they are dissatisfied and whether the outcome they are looking for sounds realistic. In discussing the complaint with the customer, consider three key questions:

- What specifically is the customer's complaint or complaints?
- What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?
- Are the customer's expectations realistic and achievable?

It may be that the customer expects more than we can provide. If so, you must make this clear to them as soon as possible.

Where possible you should also clarify what additional information you will need to investigate the complaint. The customer may need to provide more evidence to help us reach a decision.

Details of the complaint must be recorded on the system for recording complaints. Where appropriate, this will be done as a continuation of frontline resolution. The details must be updated when the investigation ends.

If the investigation stage follows attempted frontline resolution, you must hand over all case notes and associated information to the officer responsible for the investigation, and record that you have done so.

4.2.2 Timelines

The following deadlines are appropriate to cases at the investigation stage:

- complaints must be acknowledged within **three working days**
- you should provide a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but not later than **20 working days** from the time you received the complaint for investigation.

4.2.3 Extension to the timeline

Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline. For example, some complaints are so complex that they require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20-day limit. However, these would be the exception and you must always try to deliver a final response to a complaint within 20 working days.

If there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, a member of the management team will set time limits on any extended investigation, as long as the customer agrees. You must keep the customer updated on the reason for the delay and give them a revised timescale for completion. If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management must consider and confirm the extension. The reasons for an extension might include the following:

- Essential accounts or statements, crucial to establishing the circumstances of the case, are needed from staff, customers or others but they cannot help because of long-term sickness or leave.
- You cannot obtain further essential information within normal timescales.
- Operations are disrupted by unforeseen or unavoidable operational circumstances, for example industrial action or severe weather conditions.
- The customer has agreed to mediation as a potential route for resolution.

These are only a few examples, and you must judge the matter in relation to each complaint. However, an extension would be the exception and you must always try to deliver a final response to the complaint within 20 working days.

As with complaints considered at the frontline stage, the proportion of complaints that exceed the 20-day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics must go to the management team on a regular basis.

Appendix 3 provides further information on timelines.

4.2.4 Mediation

Some complex complaints, or complaints where customers and other interested parties have become entrenched in their position, may require a different approach to resolving the complaint. Where appropriate, you may consider using services such as mediation or conciliation using suitably trained and qualified mediators to try to resolve the matter and to reduce the risk of the complaint escalating further.

Mediation will help both parties to understand what has caused the complaint, and so is more likely to lead to mutually satisfactory solutions.

If you and the customer agree to mediation, revised timescales will need to be agreed.

4.2.5 Closing the complaint at the investigation stage

You must let the customer know the outcome of the investigation, in writing or by their preferred method of contact. Our response to the complaint must address all areas that we are responsible for and explain the reasons for our decision. You must record the decision, and details of how it was communicated to the customer, on the system for recording complaints. You must also make clear to the customer:

- their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint
- the time limit for doing so, and
- how to contact the SPSO.

4.2.6 Independent external review

Once the investigation stage has been completed, the customer has the right to approach the SPSO if they remain dissatisfied.

The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of our complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failures and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way we have handled the complaint.

The SPSO recommends that you use the wording below to inform customers of their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint. The SPSO also provides a leaflet, ***The Ombudsman and your organisation***, which you may find helpful in deciding how and when to refer someone to the SPSO.

SPSO Recommended Wording:

“Information about the SPSO

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about the Scottish Government, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, agencies and other government sponsored organisations. If you remain dissatisfied with an organisation after its complaints process, you can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where you have not gone all the way through the organisation’s complaints handling procedure
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about, or
- that have been or are being considered in court.”

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO
4 Melville Street
EDINBURGH
EH3 7NS

SPSO
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

Freephone: 0800 377 7330
Online contact: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us
Website: www.spsso.org.uk
Mobile site: <http://m.spsso.org.uk>

5 Governance of the Complaints Handling procedure

5.1 Roles and responsibilities

Overall responsibility and accountability for the management of complaints lies with the Assessor and ERO and the management team.

Our final position on the complaint must be signed off by a member of the management team and we will confirm that this is our final response. This ensures that the management team own and are accountable for the decision. It also reassures the customer that their concerns have been taken seriously.

The following paragraphs identify the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to the Complaints Handling Procedure

Assessor & ERO: The Assessor and ERO provides leadership and direction in ways that guide and enable us to perform effectively across all services. This includes ensuring that there is an effective Complaints Handling Procedure, with a robust investigation process that demonstrates how we learn from the complaints we receive.

The Assessor and ERO (or Depute Assessor and ERO in the case of absence) may take a personal interest in all or some complaints, or may delegate responsibility for the Complaint Handling Procedure to senior staff. Regular management reports assure the Assessor and ERO of the quality of complaints performance.

Management Team : On the Assessor and ERO's behalf, the management team will be responsible for:

- managing complaints and the way we learn from them
- overseeing the implementation of actions required as a result of a complaint
- investigating complaints
- deputising for the Assessor and ERO on occasion

However, the management team may decide to delegate some elements of complaints handling (such as investigations and the drafting of response letters) to other senior staff. Where this happens, the management team should retain ownership and accountability for the management and reporting of complaints. Members of the management team may also be responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers, so they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete and their response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

Complaints investigator: The complaints investigator is responsible and accountable for the management of the investigation. They will be involved in the investigation and in co-ordinating all aspects of the response to the customer. This may include preparing a comprehensive written report, including details of any procedural changes in service delivery that could result in wider opportunities for learning.

Administration Manager Finance/Personnel: He/she will be responsible for maintaining a record of all complaints received and for reporting on the progress of, and outcomes from, all complaints to the Management Team.

All staff: A complaint may be made to any member of staff in the Joint Board. Therefore all staff must be aware of the Complaints Handling Procedure and how to handle and record complaints at the frontline stage. They should also be aware of who to refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to handle the matter personally. **All staff are encouraged to try to resolve complaints early, as close to the point of service delivery as possible, and quickly to prevent escalation.**

5.2 Complaints about senior staff

Complaints about senior staff can be difficult to handle, as there may be a conflict of interest for the staff investigating the complaint. When serious complaints are raised against senior staff, it is particularly important that the investigation is conducted by an individual who is independent of the situation.

If the complaint is an internal one it may be more appropriate to refer to the Joint Board's "Grievance Procedure" or "Harassment at Work Policy".

5.3 Recording, reporting, learning and publicising

Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. One of the aims of the Complaints Handling Procedure is to identify opportunities to improve services provided by Tayside Valuation Joint Board. We must record all complaints in a systematic way so that we can use the complaints data for analysis and management reporting. By recording and using complaints information in this way, we can identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify training opportunities and introduce service improvements.

5.3.1 Recording complaints

To collect suitable data we must record all complaints in line with SPSO minimum requirements, as follows:

- the customer's name and address
- the date the complaint was received
- the nature of the complaint
- how the complaint was received
- the service the complaint refers to the date the complaint was closed at the frontline resolution stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was escalated to the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- action taken at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (where appropriate)
- the outcome of the complaint at each stage
- the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken.

We have structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action. These provide a detailed record of services that have failed to satisfy customers. Appendix 5 contains guidance on the logging and recording of complaints.

5.3.2 Reporting of complaints

Complaints details are analysed for trend information to ensure we identify service failures and take appropriate action. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of where services need to improve.

We publish on a quarterly basis the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response. This demonstrates the improvements resulting from complaints and shows that complaints can influence our services. It also helps ensure transparency in our complaints handling service and will help our customers see that we value their complaints.

We will:

- publicise on a quarterly basis complaints outcomes, trends and actions taken
- use case studies and examples to show how complaints have helped improve services.

This information should be reported regularly (and at least quarterly) to the management team.

5.3.3 Learning from complaints

At the earliest opportunity after the closure of the complaint, the complaints handler should always make sure that the customer and staff of the department involved understand the findings of the investigation and any recommendations made.

The management team will review the information gathered from complaints regularly and consider whether our services could be improved or internal policies and procedures updated.

As a minimum, we will:

- use complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints
- take action to reduce the risk of recurrence
- record the details of corrective action in the complaints file, and
- systematically review complaints performance reports to improve service delivery.

Where we have identified the need for service improvement:

- the action needed to improve services must be authorised
- an officer (or team) should be designated the 'owner' of the issue, with responsibility for ensuring the action is taken
- a target date must be set for the action to be taken
- the designated individual must follow up to ensure that the action is taken within the agreed timescale
- where appropriate, performance in the service area should be monitored to ensure that the issue has been resolved
- we must ensure that staff learn from complaints.

5.3.4 Publicising complaints performance information

We also report on our performance in handling complaints annually in line with SPSO requirements. This includes performance statistics showing the volumes and types of complaints and key performance details, for example on the time taken and the stage at which complaints were resolved.

5.4 Maintaining confidentiality

Confidentiality is important in complaints handling. It includes maintaining the customer's confidentiality and explaining to them the importance of confidentiality generally. We must always bear in mind legal requirements, for example, data protection legislation, as well as internal policies on confidentiality and the use of customers' information.

5.5 Managing unacceptable behaviour

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The circumstances leading to a complaint may result in the customer acting in an unacceptable way. Customers who have a history of challenging or inappropriate behaviour, or have difficulty expressing themselves, may still have a legitimate grievance.

A customer's reasons for complaining may contribute to the way in which they present their complaint. Regardless of this, we must treat all complaints seriously and properly assess them. However, we also recognise that the actions of customers who are angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on time and resources or unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. We will, therefore, apply our policies and procedures to protect staff from unacceptable behaviour such as unreasonable persistence, threats or offensive behaviour from customers.

5.6 Supporting the customer

All members of the community have the right to equal access to our Complaints Handling Procedure. Customers who do not have English as a first language may need help with interpretation and translation services, and other customers may have specific needs that we will seek to address to ensure easy access to the Complaints Handling Procedure.

We must always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality. This includes making reasonable adjustments to our service to help the customer where appropriate. Support and advocacy groups, noted in this document, are available to support customers in pursuing a complaint and customers should be directed to these as appropriate. Staff should particularly note that the Joint Board subscribes to a language translation service.

5.7 Time limit for making complaints

This Complaints Handling Procedure sets a time limit of six months from when the customer first knew of the problem, within which time they may ask us to consider the complaint, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

We will apply this time limit with discretion. In decision making we will take account of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (Section 10(1)), which sets out the time limit within which a member of the public can normally ask the SPSO to consider complaints. The limit is one year from when the person first knew of the problem they are complaining about, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time.

If it is clear that a decision not to investigate a customer's complaint will lead to a request for external review of the matter, we may decide that this satisfies the special circumstances criteria. This will enable us to consider the complaint and try to resolve it.

Complaints

The following tables give examples of complaints that may be considered at the frontline stage, and suggest possible actions to achieve resolution.

Complaint	Possible Action to Resolve Complaint
The customer complains that her application to be registered as an elector has not been dealt with timeously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologise to the customer and resolve the issue by processing the application immediately.
The customer has provided evidence to verify his claim for a reduction in Rateable Value but no response has been provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologise to the customer. • Consider the evidence and respond as a matter of priority and/or in line with the relevant appeal procedures
The customer complains that a member of staff did not attend a pre-arranged meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to the member of staff, or the line manager, to explain the customer's complaint and to agree how to resolve the issue, for example by arranging a new time and date for the meeting. • Explain the reasons for the failed appointment and apologise to the customer.
The customer complains that the quality of advice provided is not satisfactory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the relevant staff involved to review the guidance provided to assess whether or not it is acceptable. • If appropriate, agree that more/better information should be provided • Explain and apologise to the customer. • Obtain a report from the member(s) of staff involved to confirm that further information has been provided to the satisfaction of the customer. • Feedback the lessons learned from the complaint into a service improvement plan.
The customer expresses dissatisfaction in line with the definition of a complaint, but says she does not want to complain – just wants to tell us about the matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the customer that we value complaints because they help to improve services. • Encourage them to submit the complaint. • In terms of improving service delivery and learning from mistakes, it is important the customer feedback, such as this, is recorded, evaluated and acted upon. Therefore, if the customer still insists that they do not want to complain, record the matter as an anonymous complaint. This will avoid breaching the complaints handling procedure. Reassure the customer that they will not be contacted again about the matter.

What is not a complaint

A concern may not necessarily be a complaint. For example, a customer might make a routine first-time request for a service. This is not a complaint, but the issue may escalate into a complaint if it is not handled effectively and the customer has to keep on asking for service.

A customer may also be concerned about matters which have their own specific review or appeal procedures, and, where appropriate, customers must be directed to the relevant procedure. This complaints handling procedure should not, therefore, be used for dealing with customer complaints that are covered by the statutory appeal systems which are listed below:

Non Domestic Rating Valuation	Formal Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessor • Local Valuation Appeal Committee • Lands Tribunal for Scotland • Lands Valuation Appeal Court
Council Tax	Formal Proposal to Assessor Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Valuation Appeal Committee • Court of Session
Electoral Registration	Appeal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral Registration Officer • Sheriff Court
Freedom of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to redress through FOI "Review" process • Appeal to Information Commissioner

Timelines

General

In this procedure, 'day' means a working day. References to timelines throughout the Complaints Handling Procedure relate to working days. When measuring performance against the required timelines, we do not count non-working days, for example weekends, public holidays and days of industrial action where our service has been interrupted.

Timelines at frontline resolution

You must aim to achieve frontline resolution within five working days. The day you receive the complaint is day 1. Where you receive it on a non-working day, for example at the weekend or on a public holiday, day 1 will be the next working day.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Day complaint received by the Joint Board, or next working day if date of receipt is non-working day				Frontline resolution achieved or complain escalated to the investigate stage.

Extension to the five-day timeline

If you have extended the timeline at the frontline resolution stage in line with the procedure, the revised response time must be no longer than 10 working days from the date we receive the complaint.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Day we receive the complaint, or the next working day if the date of receipt is a non-working day.	In a few cases where it is clearly essential to achieve early resolution, you may authorise an extension within five working days from when the complaint was received. You must conclude the frontline resolution stage within 10 working days from the date of receipt, either by resolving the complaint or escalating it to the investigation stage.								Frontline achieved or complaint escalated to the investigation.

Transferring cases from frontline resolution to investigation

If it is clear that frontline resolution has not resolved the matter, and the customer wants to escalate the complaint to the investigation stage, you must pass the case for investigation without delay. In practice this will mean the same day that the customer is told this will happen.

Timelines at investigation

You may consider a complaint at the investigation stage:

- after attempted frontline resolution, or
- immediately on receipt if you believe the matter to be sufficiently complex, serious or appropriate to merit a full investigation from the outset.

Acknowledgement

All complaints considered at the investigation stage must be acknowledged within **three working days** of receipt. The date of receipt is:

- the day the case is transferred from the frontline stage to the investigation stage, where it is clear that the case requires investigation, or
- the day the customer asks for an investigation after a decision at the frontline resolution stage. You should note that a customer may not ask for an investigation immediately after attempts at frontline resolution, or
- the date you receive the complaint, if you think it sufficiently complex, serious or appropriate to merit a full investigation from the outset.

Investigation

You should respond in full to the complaint within **20 working days** of receiving it at the investigation stage.

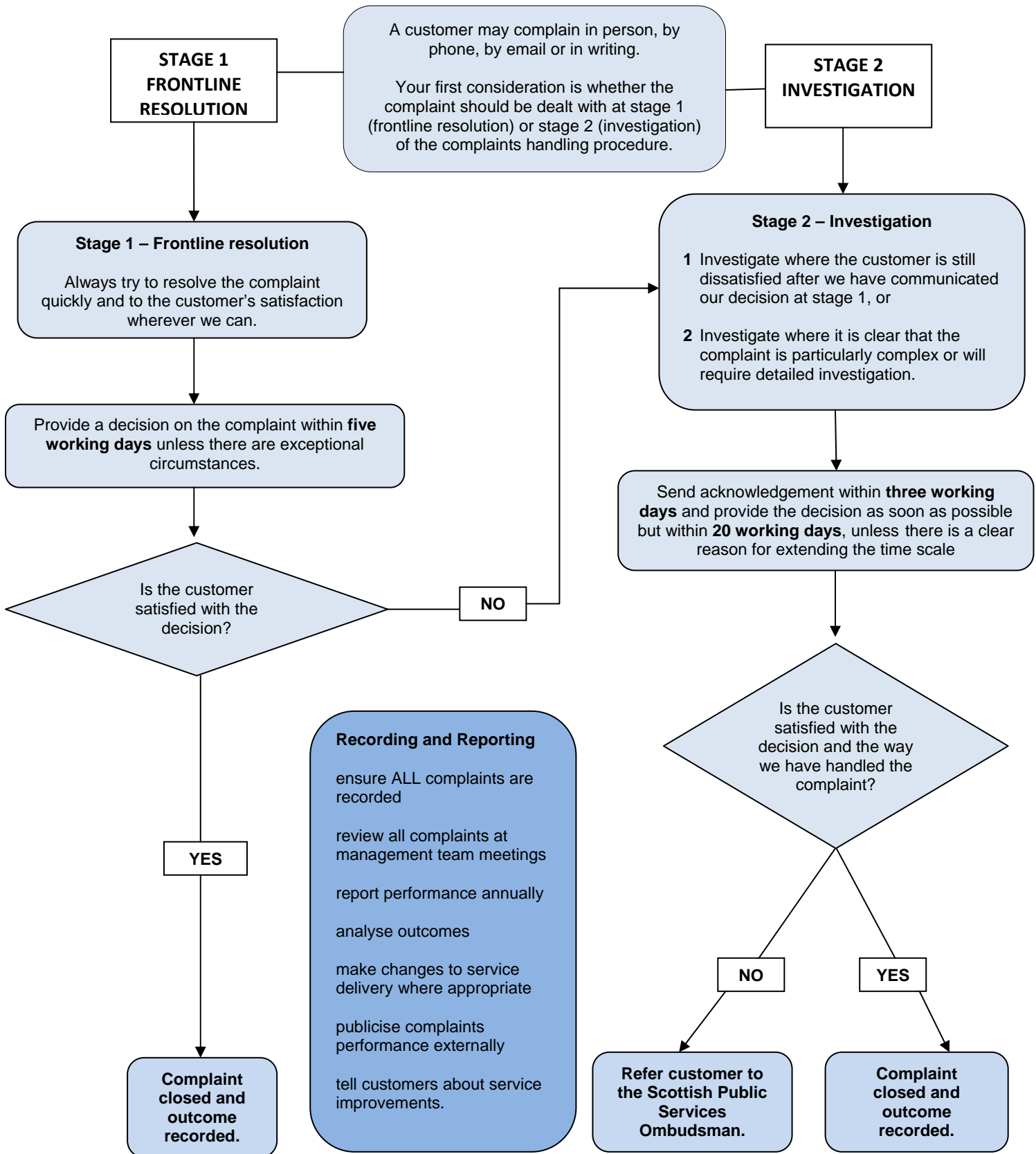
The 20-working day limit allows time for a thorough, proportionate and consistent investigation to arrive at a decision that is objective, evidence-based and fair. This means you have 20 working days to investigate the complaint, regardless of any time taken to consider it at the frontline resolution stage.

Day 1	Day 5	Day 10	Day 15	Day 20
Day complaint received at investigation stage, or next working day if date of receipt is a non-working day. Acknowledgement issued within three working days.				Joint Board's decision issued to customer or agreement reached with customer to extend deadline.

In exceptional circumstances you may need longer than the 20-day limit for a full response. If so, you must explain the reasons to the customer, and agree with them a revised timescale.

Day 1	Day 5	Day 10	Day 15	Day 20	Day 20 +
<p>Day complaint received at investigation stage, or next working day if date of receipt is a non-working day. Acknowledgement issued within three working days.</p>				<p>Joint Board's decision issued to customer or agreement reached with customer to extend deadline.</p>	<p>Issue final decision on the complaint.</p>

The Complaints Handling Procedure



The complaints handling procedure in Tayside Valuation Joint Board

COMPLAINTS LOGGING & RECORDING GUIDANCE

- 1 The recipient of the Complaint should make out a Logging Sheet to include the following:
 - Complainants Name
 - Complainant's Address
 - Complainant's Telephone No(s) and/or E-mail Address
 - Subject/Relevant Address (if different)
 - Date Received
 - How received (ie By mail, e-mail etc)
 - Received by (Name of member of staff)
 - Nature of Complaint
 - Complaint Number

The complaint number should be a simple, consecutive number within each year, which will be obtained by contacting the Administration Manager Finance/Personnel.
- 2 A copy of the Logging & Recording sheet containing the above details should be passed to the Administration Manager and the relevant Line Manager should be informed.
- 3 The person dealing with the complaint should maintain the Logging & Recording Sheet through the Frontline Resolution Stage of the process and pass it to the Investigating Officer if the complaint proceeds to that Stage. The person dealing with the complaint at the Frontline Resolution stage may be the recipient or it may be more appropriate for a Line Manager or other member of staff to deal with the complaint – this will be dependent upon the nature of the complaint.
- 4 Likewise, the Investigating Officer should maintain the Logging & Recording Sheet through the investigation Stage.
- 5 At each significant step forward in the process, the sheet should be updated and a copy passed to the Administration Manager for the Recording Sheet to be updated.
- 6 Any Complaint which is referred to the SPSO should be dealt with by the Assessor & ERO and notified to the Administration Manager on receipt.
- 7 All live Logging & Recording sheets should be referred to the Management Team by the Administration Manager for its regular meetings until the complaint is resolved.
- 8 The Administration Manager will provide the Management Team with regular reports on complaints received and resolved. (See relevant spreadsheet)
- 9 The Assessor will report to the Board and will publish a summary Complaints Report on the Board's web site (www.tvjb-vjb.gov.uk) on an annual basis.