

**Annual Customer Service Complaints Performance Report**

June 2025

**April 2023 to March 2024**

# Introduction

SEPA’s Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is in accordance with the requirements of the Model Complaints Handling Procedure published by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and requires us to publish an annual report on our performance against four key indicators, including complaint trends and the actions that have been or will be taken to improve services as a result.

For comparative purposes, the performance figures for the year April 2023 to March 2024 inclusive, are presented alongside the corresponding figures for the previous year April 2022 to March 2023 inclusive.

# Indicators

## Indicator One - total number of customer service complaints received

This indicator is a measure of the sum of the number of service complaints received at Stage 1 (this includes escalated complaints that were first received at Stage 1), and the number of complaints received directly at Stage 2.

Graph 1: Total number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints

A total of 33 service level complaints were received in the reporting period and handled under the SEPA’s CHP, with 24 being handled at Stage 1 and 9 at Stage 2.

This represents a marginal increase of 3% from the total number of complaints (32) handled in the previous year 2022/23. The number of Stage 1 complaints handled in this reporting year increased by 14% (from 21 to 24), with Stage 2 complaints reducing by 18% (from 11 to 9).

## Indicator two - number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days

This indicator reports on the number of complaints closed in full at Stage 1, Stage 2 and after escalation within MCHP timescales as % of all Stage 1, Stage 2 and escalated complaints responded to in full.

Graph 2: Stage 1 complaints closed within timescales.

Of the 21 Stage 1 complaints received in 2022-2023, 12 (57%) were closed within the recommended 5-day timescale. In 2023-2024, this was greatly improved, with 22 (91%) of the 24 Stage 1 complaints closed within timescales.

Graph 3: Stage 2 complaints closed within timescales.

Of the 11 Stage 2 complaints received in 2022-2023, 4 (36%) were closed within the recommended 20-day timescale. As with the Stage 1 complaints, this was improved In 2023-2024, with all 9 Stage 2 complaints closed within timescales.

## Indicator Three - average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

This indicator records the average (mean) time in working days to respond at Stage 1, Stage 2 and after escalation.

Response times to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints improved in the reporting year with the average number of days for Stage 1 complaints reducing from 5 days in 2022-23 to 3.9 days in 2023-24 and the average number of days for Stage 2 complaints reducing from 21 to 19.5 days.

We assess this as being due to enhanced staff awareness and understanding of the complaints handling processes following roll-out of training modules, and the priority given to customer complaints by SEPA management at the highest level.

## Indicator Four - outcome of complaints at each Stage

This indicator quantifies the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, not upheld and resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 and after escalation as % of all complaints closed at Stage 1, Stage 2 and after escalation.

Graph 4: Complaint outcomes at each Stage

A total of ​24 Stage 1 complaints were closed in year. Of these, five (21%) were Upheld, ten (42%) were found Not Upheld and seven (29%) were Resolved. Of the remaining two (8%) one was withdrawn by the complainant; the other was an anonymous complaint, recorded with “No outcome”, in accordance with our Complaints Handling Procedure. In that complaint, regulatory actions were already being taken by the relevant local EP team to address the issues raised by the anonymous complainant.

Of the complaints which were Upheld, one concerned a failure to maintain the PPC Public register, one was due to a delay in responding to a request to review a Waste management Licence, one was about an inordinate delay in responding to a customer enquiry, one involved the behaviour of a SEPA officer when driving a SEPA vehicle, and the fifth concerned an overdue payment of gratuity to a volunteer rainfall observer.

In the seven Stage 1 complaints which were Resolved, courses of action to address the respective complaints were proposed and subsequently agreed by the complainants, who considered their complaints to be Resolved.

Of the nine Stage 2 complaints closed in the period, seven (22%) were Not Upheld and two (22%) were Partially Upheld.

In the Partially Upheld Stage 2 complaints, one concerned contradictory information presented in SEPA’s online Flood Maps guidance and associated National Flood Risk Assessment (NFRA) guidance and the other related to a customer’s dissatisfaction with SEPA’s response to a reported environmental event.

# Complaint trends

No clear trends were identified from the complaints handled in the reporting period, but this will continue to be monitored and reported.

# Lessons learned/actions taken

A key part of SEPA's CHP is to learn from the complaints and implement changes to improve service.

In the seven Stage 1 complaint which were Upheld, each customer was provided with an apology, an explanation for the service failure and was given assurances that appropriate actions would be taken to address those failures, improve service and prevent any recurrence.

While no Stage 2 complaints were found to be Upheld in the reporting year, two were Partially Upheld. One of those concerned contradictory information presented in SEPA’s online Flood Maps guidance and associated National Flood Risk Assessment (NFRA) guidance. On investigation, it was found that this was due to outdated information in the NFRA guidance. An apology was issued to and accepted by the complainant and action taken to update the online information.

The second Partially Upheld Stage 2 complaint related to a customer’s dissatisfaction with SEPA’s response to a reported environmental event and the investigation found that while the relevant team’s response was consistent with current regulatory practice and appropriate to the event, SEPA’s position on how we respond to environmental event reports was not made clear when the customer submitted the report via the online Event Reporting forms. An apology was issued, and the online forms were updated to make them clearer and easier for customers to use.

# Improving services and performance from complaints

As part of SEPA’s commitment to learning from complaints, the outcomes and lessons learned are reported to management at the highest level. This demonstrates the significance SEPA places on learning from complaints. Where any necessary outcome actions are identified, these are shared with appropriate management and monitored to ensure they are implemented, and that service improvements are delivered.

To ensure that complaints handling is embedded across the business, a programme of training in handling Stage 1 complaints has been developed and is being delivered for all SEPA staff who engage with customers directly, enabling them to handle Stage 1 complaints in accordance with the CHP. Similarly, training for managers has been developed to provide them with guidance on supporting staff through the complaints process.

These CHP training resources are maintained as an open-access reference library, allowing staff to refresh their knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis, and with additional support and guidance available from members of SEPA’s Complaints team.

To further build on the Stage 1 and Managers’ CHP training modules, ad hoc online “drop-in” sessions will continue to be held to refresh teams’ awareness of the CHP processes and provide further support in complaints handling.

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