

Service complaint performance update Q2 2025/26

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This is a quarterly performance briefing about the corporate processing and consideration of service complaints and reviews. This report has been generated using information obtained from the Power BI Report Catalogue and manually run reports by IT.

Overview of 2025/26 service complaints

Table 1.0

Description: The table below shows the compliance rates, numbers received, numbers completed and the complaint outcomes in Q2 2025/26. It also shows the number of late responses. This is broken down by month and quarter.

	Complaints Received	Complaints Processed	% Complaints Answered On Time	Outcome		
				Upheld	Partial Upheld	Not upheld
July	45	38	90%	6	10	22
Aug	38	35	89%	8	8	19
Sept	28	38	74%	15	5	18
Q2 Totals	111	111				

We aim to respond to 90% of service complaints within 30 calendar days. Within this quarter, the percentage of service complaints handled on time fluctuates between 74% and 90%.

We responded to a total of 111 service complaints during Q2, with an upheld rate of 26% (in Q1 we responded to 124 service complaints, with an upheld rate of 32%). When including partially upheld cases, this rises to 47% of all service complaints in Q2 (44% in Q1). For context in Q2 DP Complaints, FOI Complaints and Information Rights combined received 13,092 complaints (in Q1 we received 12,752 complaints). So, slightly more complaints received in Q2, but still remains less than 1% resulting in a service complaint.

Complaints about PADPCS account for 64% of all service complaints, which is to be expected due to its size and function in relation to public contacts. It is worth noting that service complaints can be caused by overall demand volume growth,

while our ability to respond to service complaints is also drawing on the same resource pool that is under pressure from the increased intake we are seeing. Similarly, while the additional temporary staffing and Data Protection Transformation changes will reduce the overall backlog and alleviate pressure on case officers, there is a risk that we receive an increased proportion of service complaints as the policy changes begin to be rolled out in Q4. We will keep this under review.

Delayed responses

Below are the details of complaints to which responses were delayed, with brief details of why they were late.

Reason for delay	Count
No clear reason for delay	0
Administration/human error	7
Further information needed/requested	0
Complex complaint	1
System issues	0
Staff absence	5
High workload/backlog	4
Withdrawn	0
Grand Total	17

Outcomes and impacts

Please see below a table showing the split of complaint type and outcomes.

Complaint Category	Upheld	Partial Upheld	Not Upheld	Total Complaints
Timeliness	10	5	8	23
Dissatisfied with ICO Staff	12	13	28	53
S.51 Failure	0	0	0	0
General Service Complaint	6	5	22	33
Outside Time Limits	1	0	0	1
Additional Steps Required	0	0	0	0
S.50 Failure		0	1	1
Unassigned	0	0	0	0
Prioritisation Framework	0	0	0	0
Total Administered	29	23	59	111

- Nearly 48% the complaints were about dissatisfaction with ICO staff of which 23% were upheld.
- Complaints about timeliness constituted about 21% of all service complaints and 43% of these complaints were upheld.
- There remains work to do here in respect of meeting deadlines and improving timeliness of handling but regular monitoring of service reviews through reviewing the Power BI report is having a positive impact on this. Further information about how we are addressing this is in the annex.

Recommend and review

As observed above, complaints about dissatisfaction with ICO staff represents a concern in nearly half (48%) of service complaints, with most of these stemming from disagreement with the decision made. 23% of these complaints about ICO staff were upheld, rising to 47% when including partially upheld. In situations where such complaints have been upheld a feedback loop is in place to ensure that team members understand what has gone wrong so we can reduce such instances in future. The annex one provides some examples of how we are doing this on individual cases.

Timeliness and completing casework within time limits represents just under a quarter of cases (22% in Q2 and 27% in Q1). These were upheld in just under half the time (46% in Q2 compared to 59% in Q1).

It remains unclear whether there is a broader ICO issue with timeliness of casework handling, or that the very small sample of service complaints gives an unrepresentative picture of casework more broadly (ie people who make service complaints often have a legitimate issue to complain about).

As highlighted above reasons for delay in responding to service complaints are varied and have had to be identified manually by interrogating each case. It is

encouraging to note in Q2 that there are no cases logged where it is unclear what the reason for the delay is and this is likely to be due to the ongoing monitoring process which is identifying these cases in a more timely manner and being able to correctly classify them if they do become out of time.

Customer facing departments will therefore continue to engage in active monitoring of service complaints to ensure that they are responded to on time.

In Q2 however there were 15 cases out of 111 completed that were responded to out of time, with September being a particularly bad month (9 of the 38 cases completed were out of time). A deeper dive into these September cases indicate that this was mainly down to either the manager missing the deadline by a couple of days, high workload, manager absence or the service review not being picked up until the case was allocated. Again the regular monitoring and overseeing of open service complaints through Power BI should reduce the likelihood of this happening alongside ensuring the designated manager is not on leave or otherwise absent. If so an alternative manager may need to be appointed.

As highlighted above, service complaints and new correspondence is coming onto unallocated cases and not always getting picked up because of the volumes of complaints being received. These are now being reviewed on a weekly basis to try to limit number of cases going overdue. In the Q1 report it was noted that in PADPCS a recommendation has been made that service complaints on unallocated cases received via the helpline are allocated to LCOs for them to provide the service review outcome and the substantive case outcome at same time. Templates have been provided to LCOs doing this to assist them.

There are also issues with the drop down options available on ICE to clearly record and identify the types of service reviews. For example, there is no clear definition of what constitutes a general service complaint and it is usually used

when the issues complained about do not neatly fit into any of the other categories. Drop down options have been reviewed and expanded as part of the Service Review Audit Recommendations and a paper detailing these has been sent onto the ICE Product Team in March last year. This includes a recommendation of producing clear guidance on the use of each of the drop down options. There is no further update on this at the present time.

Risks and Challenges

From an analysis of the data the following new risks and challenges have been identified in Q2:

- Manager workload or absence preventing responses to service reviews being made in time
- There remains the risk of service reviews not being picked up on unallocated cases unless a process is put in place to address this

In Q1 the following risks and challenges were observed from the data and remain relevant:

- In the challenging context of high caseloads, the 48 hour call back SLA and 14 day email SLA may continue to be a source of upheld service complaints (further information in Annex).

Summary of PHSO Complaints

All customers are offered the opportunity to appeal to the PHSO if they are unhappy with the way in which the ICO has handled their complaint.

The PHSO has provided the following data for 2025/26 Q2:

Complaint Category	Total
Complaints Received	75
Not properly made	26
General Discretion	17
Premature	16
Out of remit	0
Specific Discretion	0
Complaint Withdrawn	2
Other	13
Resolution	1
Accepted for detailed investigation	0
Total Concluded at Initial Checks & Primary Investigation	75

The table above shows the PHSO referrals and outcomes.

- Out of 75 Service Complaints escalated to the PHSO in Q2 2025/26, none have been accepted for detailed investigation.
- In Q1 72 complaints were received and none accepted for detailed investigation. Interestingly in Q2 there was a jump in the number of complaints prematurely made from six in Q1 to 16 in Q2 which may

suggest our complaints process had not been completed in these cases before the complaint was referred to the PHSO

- In the 2024/25 financial year, a total of 265 complaints were escalated to PHSO. This means, on average, that 66.25 complaints are referred to PHSO per quarter. 75 complaints were referred to PHSO in Q2 of this financial year, a slight increase on Q1.
- If this trend continues, it may be that we see a marginal uptick on complaints being referred to PHSO this year compared to last year.

Annex – Dip sample

We have completed a dip sample of cases which meet the following criteria:

- The complaint is upheld; and
- the complaint is about 'dissatisfied with ICO staff'

With an aim of understanding:

- Common themes across both categories of what we are upholding in this space and any reflections on what this tells us we may need to do around general learning/training/quality assessment in this space.
- Specific reference to what we are defining as 'part upheld' and any recommendations/reflections on this.
- Any reflections on what the themes tell us about the breadth of this category and changes we may want to think about from an ICE perspective to give us more nuance (e.g. we discussed whether a chunk of this linked to failures to do a call back at the right time and if this may be worth separating out).
- Themes from the actions/recommendations we have taken forward on the back of the elements of a complaint we have upheld and assurance that these are being delivered as described in the review outcome.

The outcome of this dip sample is detailed below.

What kind of complaints end up in this category?

The following themes were noticed in the dip sample, remaining similar to Q1:

- Failure to communicate effectively or missing SLAs, eg call back not being made within 48 hours, emails not being responded to within 14 days, or not notifying complainant about a closure.
- Reasonable adjustments being missed.
- Concerns about staff professionalism.
- Failure to follow process, eg a service complaint or an FOI request has not been spotted.
- Lack of clarity or inadequate explanation in explaining our decisions or process
- On the other hand occasionally the case officer may have unnecessarily complicated a complaint or made it unnecessarily convoluted.

What actions have we taken?

The review noted that PADPCS receive the highest number of service complaints owing to their size compared to other case working teams. The importance of our 48 hour call backs and 14 day response SLAs will be highlighted with colleagues again.

We have identified that there may also be some benefit in specific training or refresher training on managing reasonable adjustments and PADPCS teams have been working closely with OD&C to source a suitable course. This was trialled by LCOs and feedback will inform the roll out.

It was noted that in some cases, PADPCS customer concerns related more to the outcome rather than the service provided. These should have been set up as a case review rather than a service review. We have identified the need to raise awareness of which process is appropriate and giving team managers the confidence to refuse service reviews where the matter is outside the scope of the policy. In other areas of the office such as FOI steps are being taken to ensure that service reviews are also not set up inappropriately or prematurely.

Is there any assurance that actions following a service complaint are being delivered?

PADPCS advises that where staff professionalism has been raised, these will then be monitored by the QA process.

Due to the low volumes of complaints in Information Access and FOI Complaints, follow up actions are handled on an ad hoc basis as and when such complaints are made.

Case examples of upheld complaints about dissatisfaction with staff and action taken

- In one case there was a late notification to the manager of the complaint which related to the misgendering of the customer. In response an apology was issued for the distress caused by the misgendering and the records of the customer were updated to reflect their gender and the case reassigned to another case officer.
- A service complaint was taken over the phone and passed to the relevant manager but no evidence this was responded to. Feedback was provided to the relevant team and the customer advised the case will be used for ongoing training and development.

- There was a delay in replying due to the manager being on leave for three weeks and an apology was provided to the customer. The complaint was upheld on the basis that the case officer should have asked for the available evidence the customer claimed to have and was willing to provide at the outset of the case. The case officer should also have provided clearer guidance on what types of information we accept. We were not clear enough and should have provided more explanation if the process was unclear. The manager confirmed they would discuss with the case officer to give feedback.
- Late response to service complaint as manager on leave. Case officer flagged with another manager who noted the reasons for the delay in their response to the customer. Again it was noted that the case officer didn't explain the outcome clearly enough to the customer over the course of handling the case. Feedback given to case officer and lessons learnt internally.
- Due to workload pressures a response to a service complaint was late. Manager noted that the case officer had mischaracterised the conversation they had with complainant but was clearer in handling of certain matters.
- Another late response due to workload pressures. Manager accepted we should have accepted the case earlier as we had correct documentation which would have enabled the case to be handled sooner.
- Another reasonable adjustment provided in telephone call was not recorded. Feedback provided to the case officer.
- No callback by case officer when requested, breach of service level agreement of 48 hours and manager felt case did require further work/investigation. Feedback provided to case officer.