
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

10 September 2019

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Title: 2018/19 Complaint Report

Purpose: To inform the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of the Council's complaint performance and the volumes and trends of complaints received in Financial Year 2018/19.

Recommendation: That the Committee notes the report and the information provided.

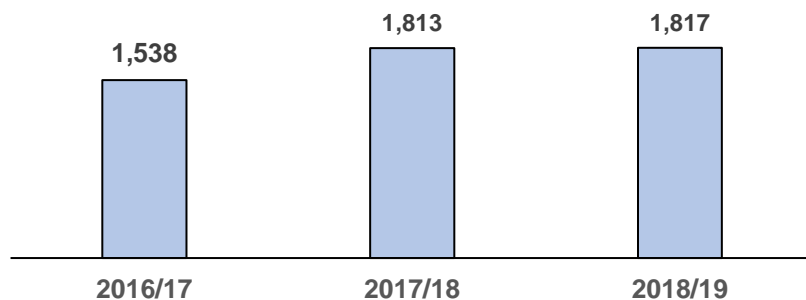
1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report details complaint information relating to North Ayrshire Council during 2018/19, covering the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.
- 1.2 In order to allow comparisons the report also details complaint data covering 2016 and 2017 (referred to in the report as 2016/17 and 2017/18).
- 1.3 Performance is measured through a number of Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) performance indicators, some of which have national targets.

2. Background

- 2.1 This section contains statistical information and commentary on some of the key complaint performance indicators devised by the SPSO in conjunction with all 32 Scottish councils. More information relating to all the indicators can be found in the attached report.

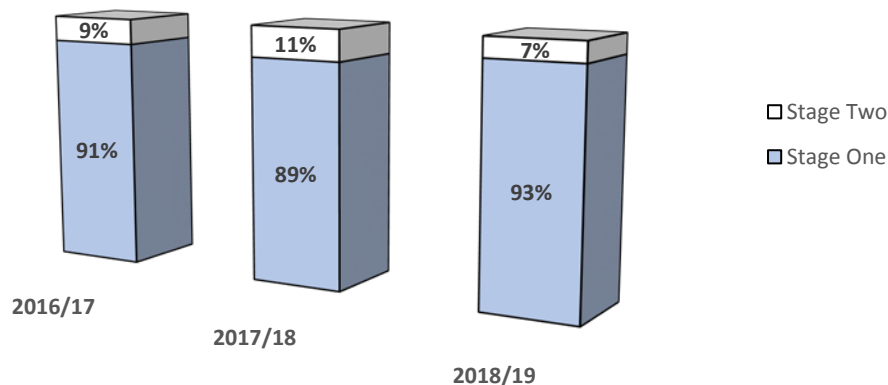
2.2 *Volume of complaints received and closed*



- 2.2.1 A similar volume of complaints was received in 2018/19 compared to the previous year but there are valid reasons for this. More details can be found in the attached report.

2.2.2 Although complaint volumes are recorded the key point is to ensure lessons are learned as a result of complaints in order to prevent reoccurrence.

2.3 **Complaints closed at each Stage**



2.3.1 Whilst there is no national target for the number of complaints to be closed under each Stage, the Council always seeks to maximise closure at Stage One as complainants receive a quicker resolution than under Stage Two and reduces the impact on complaint handlers' time and the possibility of ombudsman referrals.

2.4 **Complaint outcomes**

Outcome	Volume		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Fully Upheld	39%	37%	43%
Partly Upheld	16%	18%	15%
Not Upheld	45%	45%	42%

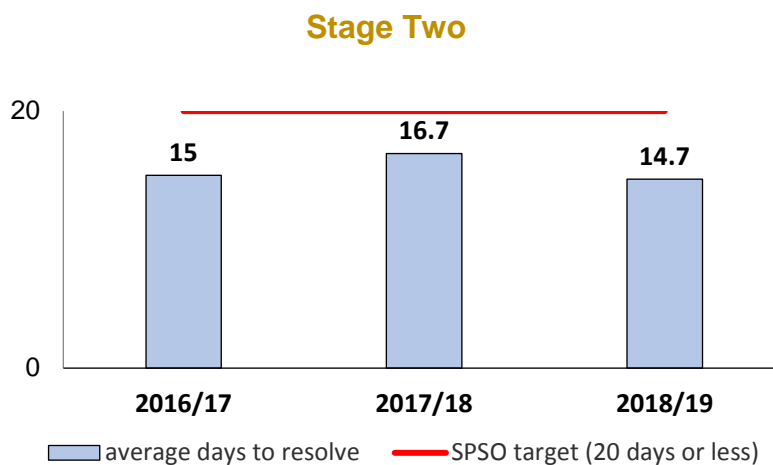
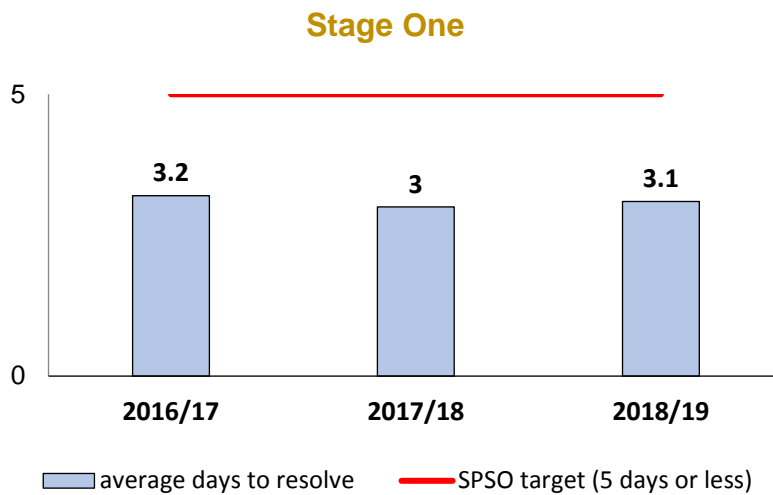
2.4.1 Fully Upheld complaints are those where the Council has had to take action to address or fix something. Partly Upheld complaints are complaints that have more than one complaint element where at least one of them was fully upheld.

2.4.2 Analysis shows the majority of Fully Upheld complaints in 2018/19 related to the Place Directorate (in particular Waste Services) and the majority of Partially Upheld complaints also related to Place (in particular Waste Services and Building Services). Although the bulk of complaints Not Upheld in 2018/19 were also associated with Place they related to a number of different Services.

2.4.3 Complaints that were not upheld related to policies, regulations or complaints that were poor quality submissions and/or proved to be unfounded.

2.4.4 Further analysis of complaint outcomes is detailed in Section 7 of the accompanying report.

2.5 Average time in working days for a full response at each Stage



2.5.1 The average time in working days for a response under both Stages has met the SPSO target response timescales for the last three years.

2.6 Complaints closed within timescale



2.6.1 The national target for complaints closed under Stage One is 80% or above. This target was exceeded by 12%.

2.6.2 The national target for complaints closed under Stage Two is 85% or above. This target was exceeded by 3%.

2.6.3 Complaints that did not meet timescale were due to several factors and extensions could have been approved for some of these. More details of complaints not closed on time are contained in the attached report.

2.7 *Complaint timescale extensions*

2.7.1 Stage One complaints should be responded to within 5 working days but we can extend them an additional 5 working days (10 if the complaint relates to Social Work) under certain circumstances. Stage Two complaints should be responded to within 20 working days but again we can extend the timescale of these to a date in the future if certain circumstances are met.

2.7.2 A total of 73 complaints had their timescales extended during the year and most were Stage Ones. Reasons for extension included complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations, information awaited from third parties to support investigations and the complexity of the complaints.

2.7.3 More information on complaints that were extended is contained in the attached report.

2.8 *Trends identified from upheld/partially upheld complaints*

2.8.1 Key complaint topics for upheld or partially upheld complaints within some of the Directorates are noted below:

Education & Youth Employment	Issues relating to pupil behaviour; teaching cover and/or arrangements.
Finance & Corporate Support	Contact Centre/Customer Service Centre waiting times; incorrect information provided; employee actions.
HSCP	Service delivery; employee actions.
Place	Communication; gas central heating issues; planned works for tenants, street lighting; grass or verge cutting; cemetery/churchyard management; missed bins/pullouts; employee actions.

2.8.2 Employee actions appears as a key topic in some Directorates but the definition is broad and can be used where complainants have perceived employee actions or behaviour to be unacceptable. Where any unacceptable behaviour was identified, appropriate action will have been taken to address.

2.8.3 More information on complaint topics is contained in the attached report.

2.9 *Changes or Improvements made as a result of complaints*

2.9.1 Not all Services can implement improvements as a result of complaints due to a number of factors, including the feasibility of making changes and resource/budget considerations. That said, improvements were made in some Services as a result of complaints received during the year and a selection are noted in the attached report.

3. **Proposals**

3.1 It is proposed the Committee approves the report and recognises NAC performance in relation to the information listed in Section 2 above.

4. **Implications**

Financial:	None
Human Resources:	None
Legal:	None
Equality:	None
Children and Young People:	None
Environmental & Sustainability:	None
Key Priorities:	<p>The Two Stage CHP supports the Council's key priority of delivering more effective and efficient service provision.</p> <p>Timely reports are produced with the focus on determining trends and service improvements.</p> <p>Support and guidance from the Complaint Manager ensures greater consistency in complaint handling, improvements in response times and a reduction in duplication of effort.</p>
Community Benefits:	The Two Stage CHP demonstrates a commitment to improve service delivery for North Ayrshire customers and residents.

5. **Consultation**

5.1 A working group comprising officers from a number of Scottish Local Authorities is producing a standard Complaint Handling Satisfaction Survey that Councils can issue to complainants to capture their views and feedback on how their complaints were handled. An further update on this piece of work will be provided in the half yearly 2019/20 complaint report.

ANDREW FRASER
HEAD OF SERVICE (DEMOCRATIC)

For further information please contact **Darren Miller** on **(01294) 322988**.

Background Papers

Nil



Complaint Report 2018/19



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Introduction

North Ayrshire Council always seeks to deliver the best services possible to its customers and residents but it is recognised that dissatisfaction will sometimes occur. When it does we want to know what went wrong, why it went wrong and what we can do to make things right.

The Council recognises valuable lessons can be learnt from complaints which are defined as being expressions of dissatisfaction from members of the public about actions, or lack of actions, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council.

The Council's complaint handling procedure (CHP) has two stages for handling complaints from the public:-

1

Stage One complaints (also known as *Frontline Resolution*) are straightforward, non-complex complaints the Council can resolve at the initial point of contact or as close to the point of service delivery as possible. The Council has up to 5 working days to resolve these.

2

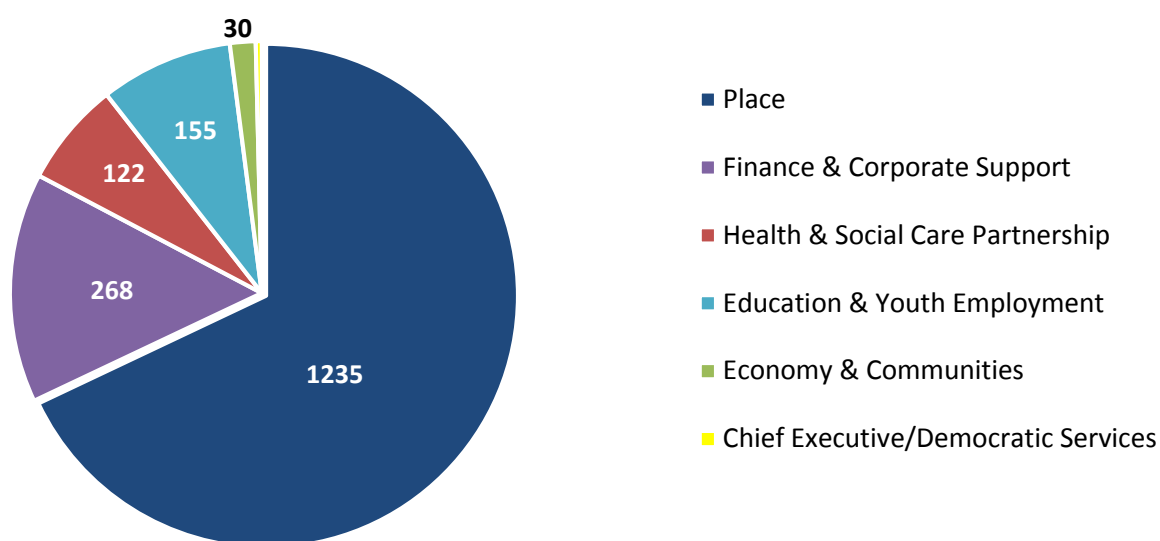
Stage Two complaints (also known as *Investigations*) are complaints the Council are typically unable to resolve at Stage One and need more time to carry out further investigation. This may be because the nature of the complaint is complex, serious or high risk. The Council has up to 20 working days to resolve these.

This report details the Council's complaint handling performance covering the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 (referred in the report as 2018/19). Performance is measured through a number of Scottish Public Services Ombudsman indicators, some of which have national targets. Where appropriate complaint information relating to previous years has been included in certain sections to allow yearly comparisons to be made.

Reporting complaints is a statutory requirement and is monitored by Audit Scotland.

1 Volume of complaints closed

1,817 complaints were closed during the year and the chart below provides a breakdown per directorate:



The following tables highlight complaint volumes per directorate under each Stage:

Place	Stage One	Stage Two
Building Services	185	1
Facilities Management	7	0
Housing	56	16
Property Management & Investment	112	4
Roads	73	4
Streetscene	134	1
Transport	0	2
Waste Services	637	3
Total	1204	31

Finance & Corporate Support	Stage One	Stage Two
Benefits	34	1
Business Support	1	0
Customer Services	125	2
Financial Management	1	0
Multi-Service	18	8
Revenues	56	5
Revenues & Benefits (other)	2	0
Risk & Insurance	3	0
Transformation	12	0
Total	252	16

Health & Social Care Partnership	Stage One	Stage Two
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	32	23
Health & Community Care	25	18
Mental Health	5	8
Support Services	8	3
Total	70	52

Education & Youth Employment	Stage One	Stage Two
Education HQ	52	8
Schools	80	15
Total	132	23

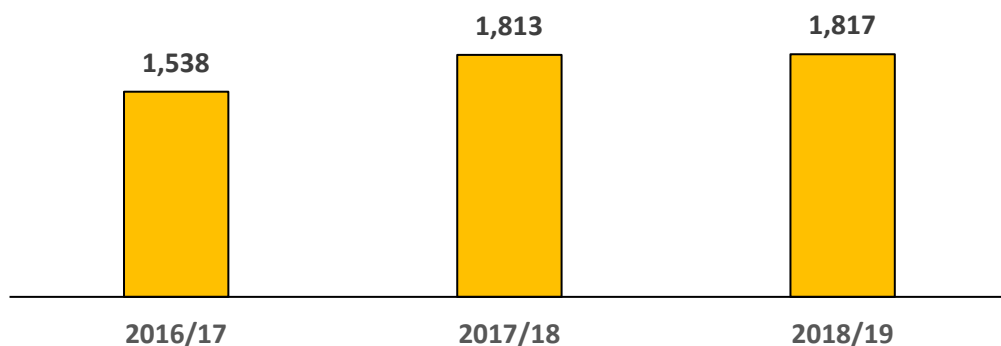
Economy & Communities	Stage One	Stage Two
Community Facilities	2	0
Learning & Development	1	0
Information & Culture	8	1
Planning	4	4
Protective Services	5	3
Regeneration	2	0
Total	22	8

Chief Executive/Democratic Services	Stage One	Stage Two
Committee/Member Services	0	1
Licencing	4	1
Legal	1	0
Total	5	2

- Although there is no target for the volume of complaints handled under each Stage, the Council seeks to maximise closure at Stage One wherever possible and 93% were handled at this Stage during the year.
- The majority of Stage One complaints were handled by Commercial Services within the Place directorate.
- In Education, Stage One complaints are normally handled by schools and if complainants remain unhappy with the resolutions the complaints are escalated to Stage Two and handled in Education HQ by Senior Managers. The reason there was a higher than expected volume of Stage One HQ complaints during the year is because some related to school employees that had to be handled by Senior Managers from the outset and not by the schools.

Year on Year comparison

The chart below shows a comparison of the volume of complaints received over the last three years.



- Social Work complaints aligned with the Two Stage procedure the rest of the Council uses from 1 April 2017 and complaint volumes began to be included in the Council's complaint statistics from this date. This helps explain the higher complaint volumes reported in 2017/18 and 2018/19 when compared to 2016/17.

The table below shows the volume breakdown for each directorate over the three periods

Directorate	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Variance (17/18 – 18/19)
Chief Executive/ Democratic Services	7	6	7	neg.
Economy & Communities	44	33	30	-9%
Education & Youth Employment	84	116	155	+34%
Finance & Corporate Support	257	279	268	-4%
HSCP (Social Work complaints)	-	127	122	-4%
Place	1,146	1,237	1,235	neg.
Total	1,538	1,798*	1,817	+17%

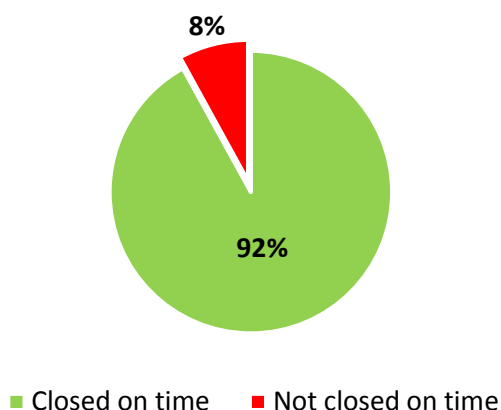
*15 complaints have been excluded from the 2017/18 volume as they were complaints about a decision made by Elected Members.

- The 34% increase in complaints in the Education directorate in 2018/19 (when compared to 2017/18) can be attributed to schools better identifying complaints as a result of extra complaint handling training provided during the year. This is therefore not seen as a negative trend but as a positive consequence of the additional training.

2 Complaints closed on time

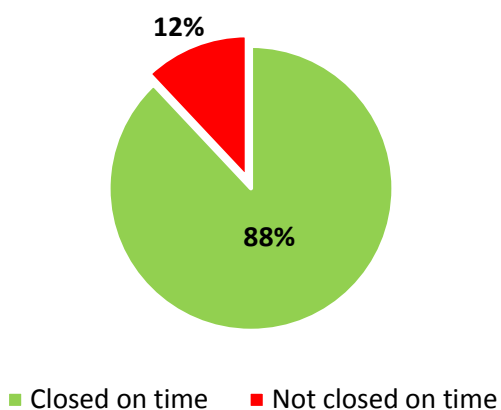
The percentage of complaints closed on time during the period under both Stages are noted below:

Stage Ones



- The national target for closing Stage One complaints on time is 80% or above and the Council exceeded the target by 12%.
- The volume closed on time includes extended complaints that met their new due dates*.

Stage Twos



- The national target for closing Stage Two complaints on time is 85% or above and the Council exceeded the target by 3%.
- The volume closed on time includes extended complaints that met their new due dates**.

* Stage One complaints can be extended an additional 5 working days (10 if they relate to social work)

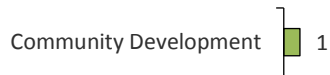
** Stage Two complaints can be extended to any agreed date in the future

3 Volume of complaints not closed on time per Directorate

This section provides details of complaints not closed on time under each Stage and includes extended complaints that did not meet their new timescales.

Stage Ones

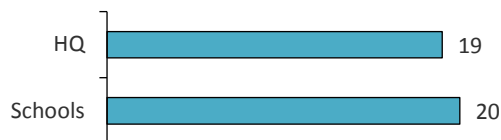
Economy & Communities



Notes

One Community Development complaint was not closed on time as the Service had to agree the complaint elements with the complainant and then engage with another service to resolve.

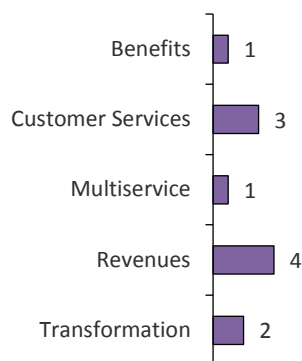
Education



Over half of all HQ complaints and over half of all school complaints did not have any reasons recorded why they breached. It is therefore unclear what caused the delays in resolving them.

The remainder that breached included complaints requiring further investigation or were received during school closure periods. Some of these could therefore have been escalated to Stage Two or had their timescales extended.

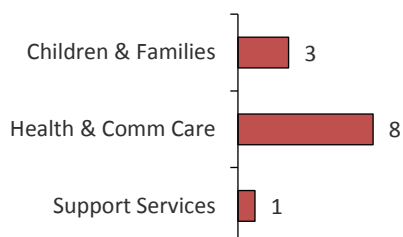
Finance & Corporate Support



Some FACs complaints breached timescale due to delays with complaints reaching the relevant Services.

A number of complaints did not have reasons recorded why they breached.

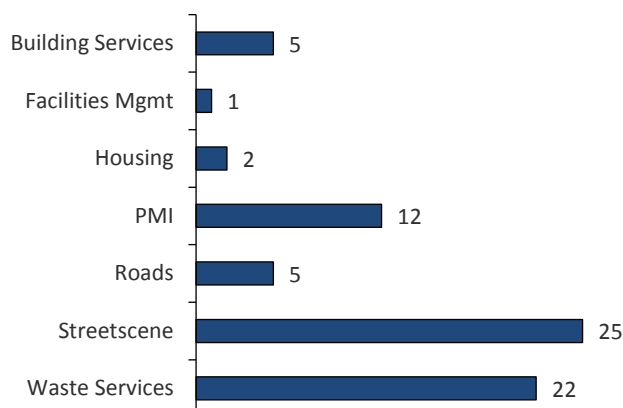
HSCP (Social Work complaints)



The majority of HSCP complaints that breached did not have reasons recorded why.

The remainder that breached included delays in third parties providing decisions, home visits having to be arranged to discuss complaints in person and complainants not being available to help determine the outcomes required/expected.

Place

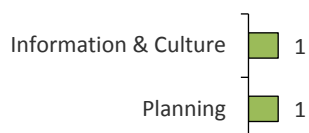


Half of all complaints that breached timescale across the Place directorate (relating mainly to Streetscene and Waste Services) did not have reasons recorded why they breached.

The other complaints that breached were various in nature and included delays in signoff for responses, complaints requiring further investigation, customers being unavailable to assist investigations and complaints requiring thorough investigation before the outcome could be provided. Some of these complaints could have had their timescales extended or been considered at Stage Two.

Stage Twos

Economy & Communities

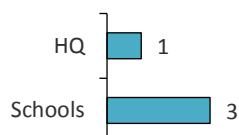


Notes

One Libraries complaint breached because the complaint handler went on annual leave and this hindered progress of the investigation. This complaint could have had its timescale extended.

One Planning complaint breached its due date due to a delay in the final response letter being approved.

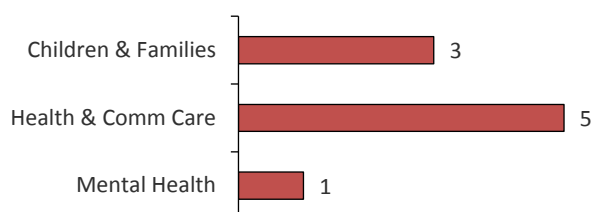
Education



Due to school holidays and a parent being unavailable to assist with the investigation, one Education HQ complaint breached its due date.

The School complaints that breached had no reasons recorded why so it cannot be determined what caused the delays.

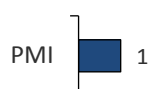
HSCP (Social Work complaints)



Some HSCP complaints breached due to delays in response letters being approved and additional information being sourced or provided.

The remainder had no reasons recorded why they breached.

Place



One Property Management & Investment complaint breached due to a delay in the response letter being signed off.

- 52% of all Stage One complaints that did not meet timescale had no reasons recorded why they breached. Analysis will be undertaken in 2019/20 to identify why and appropriate action taken to ensure reasons are recorded to allow better trends and patterns to be identified.
- Some complaints breached because no annual leave handovers took place. When a complaint handler is unavailable processes should be in place to allow complaints to continue to be progressed.
- Some Stage Two complaints could have had their timescales extended given the mitigating circumstances. If a complaint handler determines a Stage Two complaint will not meet timescale and there are good reasons for this, extending the timescale should always be considered.
- Complaint response letters should be approved and issued promptly by senior management to reduce the number of complaints breaching timescale this way.

4 Upheld/partially upheld key complaint topics

Key topics for upheld or partially upheld complaints within Services during the year are listed below. Services will not be listed if no trends were identified or too few complaints were upheld to allow meaningful analysis.

Education & Youth Employment

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Schools / HQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing bullying between pupils • Teaching cover/arrangements

Finance & Corporate Support

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Customer Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting times to speak to an Adviser • Incorrect information provided • Employee Actions
Revenues (Council Tax)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery of monies

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Actions
Health & Community Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee Actions • Service delivery

Place

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Building Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality issues (work incomplete or poor workmanship) • Follow ups not done • Communication
PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas Central Heating (including maintenance) • Planned works for tenants
Roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street lighting
Streetscene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grass/verge cutting • Cemetery/churchyard management
Waste Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missed bins (all colours) • Missed pullouts (all colours) • Employee Actions

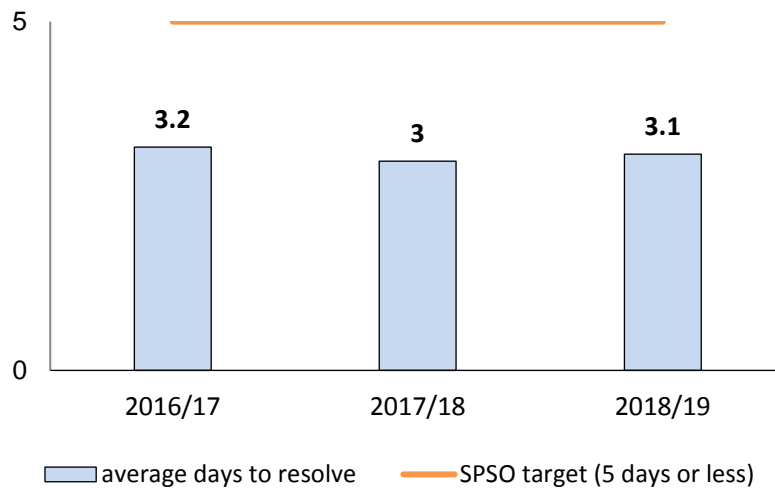
- For Waste Services, the majority of missed bins and pullouts that were upheld or partially upheld related to brown bins.
- Employee Actions appears as a key topic for some Services but the definition is broad and has been used where complainants perceived employee actions or behaviour to be unacceptable. This could include instances where:
 - The attitude of employees were considered inappropriate
 - The content/tone of letters from employees were considered inappropriate
 - Employees made inappropriate comments or offered inappropriate advice
 - Employees were considered 'officious' when quoting procedures, policies or regulations

Where unacceptable behaviour was identified by Services appropriate action will have been taken to address.

5 Average time in working days for a full response

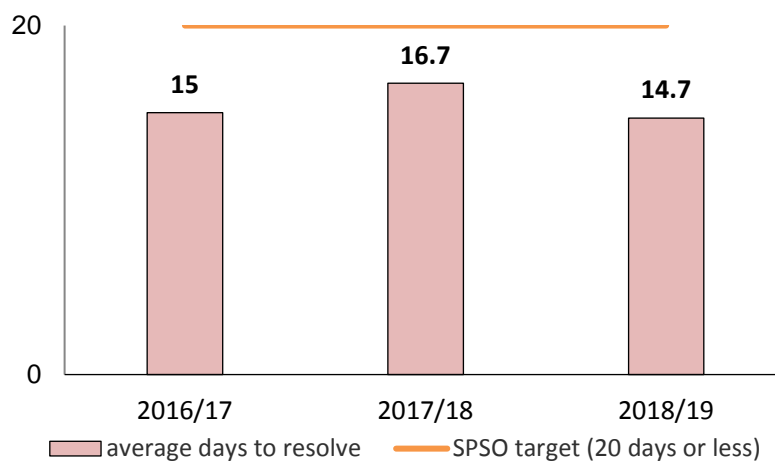
The average time in working days to close complaints under both Stages during the year are noted below. Values for previous years have been included to allow comparisons to be made and any complaints that had their timescales extended are excluded from the calculations.

Stage One



- The average time to close Stage One complaints over the last three years has consistently exceeded the target.

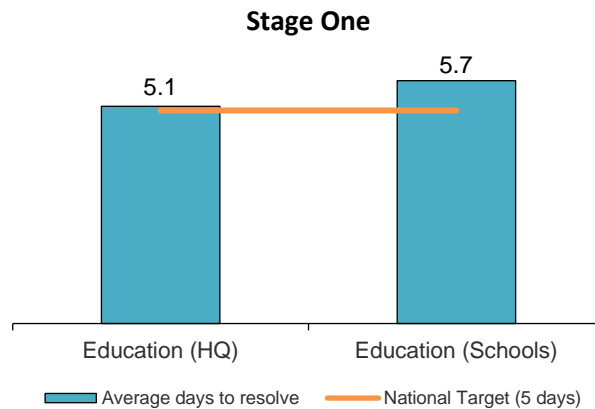
Stage Two



- The average time to close Stage Two complaints in 2018/19 reduced by two full days when compared to 2017/18.

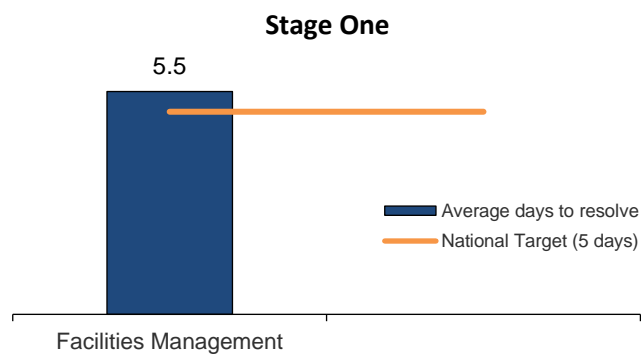
The bar charts below detail Services that did not meet the average time in working days for a response under either Stage. Services that met the target are not listed and any complaints that had their timescales extended have been excluded from the calculations.

Education & Youth Employment



Several Stage One complaints for both schools and HQ were closed beyond the 5 working day timescale, resulting in the target not being met. As highlighted in Section 3, over half of these complaints had no details why they breached so it cannot be ascertained what caused the delays.

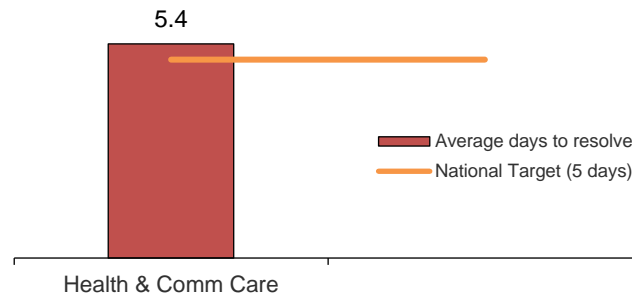
Place



Of all the Stage One complaints handled by Facilities Management, one complaint did not meet the 5 working day timescale which resulted in the target not being met. The reason it breached was due to the complaint being initially routed to the incorrect workflow queue and subsequent issues with access rights to the queue (which were subsequently addressed).

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

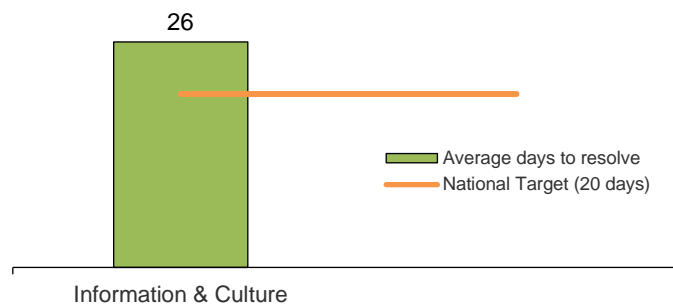
Stage One



The Health & Community Care service handled many Stage One complaints during the year but several were closed outside the 5 working day timescale resulting in the target not being met. Most had no details recorded why they breached so it could not be ascertained what caused the delays.

Economy and Communities

Stage Two



Information & Culture handled one Stage Two complaint during the period but as it was closed on working day 26 the target was not met. The complaint breached due to employee annual leave hindering progress of the investigation.

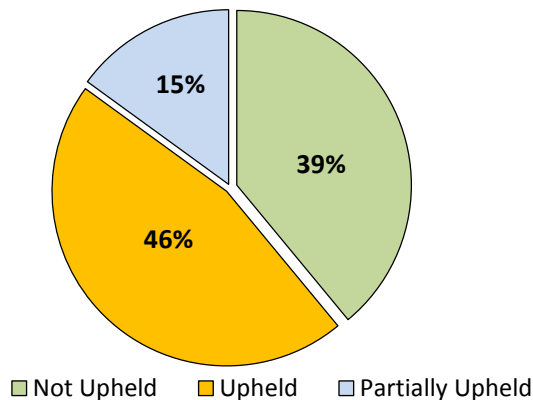
- As mentioned earlier in the report, when a complaint handler is unavailable contingency plans should be in place to allow complaints to continue to be progressed.
- Complaint handlers should always record the reason a complaint has not met timescale when being closed to allow trends and patterns to be identified.
- Extensions could have been considered for some of these complaints.

6 Extended complaints

- 73 complaints had their timescales extended during the year and most were Stage Ones. The complaints related mainly to services within the Place and HSCP directorates.
- There were sound reasons for extending, including complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations, information awaited from third parties to support investigations and the complexity of the complaints.
- Of the 73 complaints extended, 86% were closed within their new due dates.

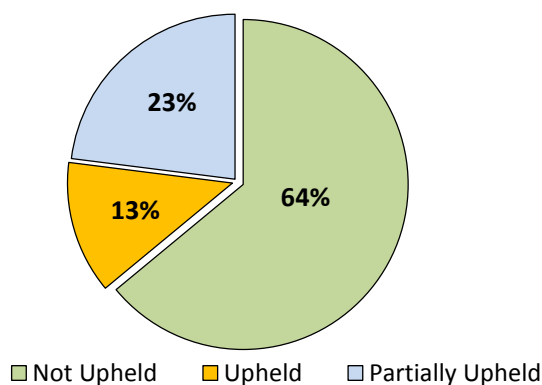
7 Complaint Outcomes

Stage One



- Over one third of upheld and partially upheld* complaints related to Waste Services and in particular bin collections. The remainder related to various other Services.
- The majority not upheld were policy-related or were unproven/unfounded.
- The policy-related complaints were diverse in nature and related to internal and external policies.

Stage Two



- One third of upheld and partially upheld* Stage Two complaints related to the Health and Social Care Partnership. The remainder related to various other services and directorates.
- The majority not upheld were unproven/unfounded.

*Partially Upheld complaints are those that contain more than one complaint element and only some have been upheld.

8 Improvements made as a result of complaints

- ✓ As a result of complaints from some residents that their waste bins had been emptied but left in positions that was blocking driveways/pavements, a process was introduced with collection crews to ensure waste bins were replaced appropriately.
- ✓ A tenant's new heating system developed a fault and a delay occurred due to issues contacting the contractor to agree repairs. An apology was offered for the delay and a process introduced whereby changes to the contractor's contact details will be cascaded to all relevant teams, including the Contact Centre.
- ✓ A customer requested a form to apply for Universal Credit but was issued with an incorrect form which delayed the application. An apology was offered to the customer and remedial training provided to the team. A checking process was also introduced to ensure correct application forms are issued when requested.
- ✓ A customer complained that a document had been handed into a Customer Service Centre (CSC) but had not been scanned and forwarded to the relevant department. An apology was offered and a process introduced so when a document is scanned a check is made to ensure the scan has been saved before allowing the customer to leave the CSC. The original documents are also being retained for one month should any issues arise with the scans being received by the relevant department.



- ✓ As a result of incorrect letters being issued to customers requesting payment for outstanding Council Tax, the recovery process was reviewed and additional checks and parameters adopted to ensure such letters are suppressed in future.
- ✓ A number of Housing Association tenants in a new development complained that their waste bins were not being serviced and they were having to contact the Council regularly requesting collection. A Council Officer contacted the tenants to explain the bins were not being emptied due to access issues with construction vehicles in the area and a process introduced where these particular waste bins would be collected earlier in the day to avoid construction traffic. It was also arranged for the Housing Association to issue letters to their tenants informing them of the new process.
- ✓ A customer raised a concern with the quality of grass cutting in an area where rubbish had been cut along with the grass. The area was inspected and it was agreed the debris presented a risk to dogs. As a result the operatives in that area were instructed to inspect their work and raise any issues with grass cutting that could present a safety risk.

The above are a few examples of actions taken and/or improvements made by Services as a result of complaints received.

9 Compliments

Over 500 compliments were recorded during the year and the table below details the volumes:

Directorate	Volume
Chief Executive/Democratic Services	3
Economy & Communities	69
Finance & Corporate Support	91
Health & Social Care Partnership	116
Place	229

Of the compliments recorded:

- A number were cross-Council, with customers commending or praising more than one service.
- Some were internal, with employees complimenting other employees.
- Many related to specific individuals as well as teams.
- Compliments received in the Education directorate were not recorded.

The word cloud below illustrates some of the feedback received from customers and residents:



10 Complaint Handling Review

The Council's Two Stage complaint handling procedure improves Council services by learning from complaints, improves relationships with customers/residents and enhances the Council's reputation. The procedure also supports employees when complaints are received.

As the procedure was introduced in 2013, a review was undertaken during 2018/19 to ensure the procedure remains fit for purpose. This included reviewing the Council's corporate Two Stage complaint handling procedure document, complaint handling guidance, complaint reporting and other complaint-related processes. The review was Council-wide and involved many employees.

There were many outputs from the review and key ones are noted below.

The Council's corporate Two Stage complaint procedure was updated, which included:

- Enhancing Stage One and Stage Two complaint handling guidance
- Introducing checklists and audit trail documents to support complaint handlers
- Updating apology guidance.

The complaint pages in the Council's intranet were updated with new sections, including:

- A new section providing guidance on how employees/complaint handlers should handle/address complaints
- A new section providing examples of complaints and how employees should action them.

The corporate complaint handling study module was updated with new content, including:

- Guidance on how employees/complaint handlers should consider complaints
- Guidance to help complaint handlers find solutions to complaints
- Introducing a handy hints and tips section for employees to consider when handling complaints.

Making these changes ensures the Council's complaint handling processes remain robust and that employees have the appropriate tools, resources and support to manage and handle complaints.

11 ALEO complaints

An Arms-Length External Organisation (ALEO) is an organisation formally separate from a local authority but still subject to its control and influence. Given this, ALEOs must comply with the same complaint procedure used by its affiliated local authority.

North Ayrshire Leisure Limited (NALL) is an ALEO for North Ayrshire Council and this section highlights complaints handled in 2018/19 by NALL using the same Two Stage procedure the Council uses.

Complaints received per Business Area and Complaint Category

Business Area	Complaint Category	Volume
LEISURE		
Irvine	Activities & Programming	20
	Facilities General	26
	Facilities Cleanliness	4
	Customer Service	9
Three Towns	Activities & Programming	6
	Facilities General	16
	Facilities Cleanliness	6
	Customer Service	11
Garnock & Kilwinning	Activities & Programming	6
	Facilities General	11
	Facilities Cleanliness	2
	Customer Service	0
North Coast & Arran	Activities & Programming	9
	Facilities General	9
	Facilities Cleanliness	0
	Customer Service	0
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
Active Lifestyles	Activities & Programming	7
	Customer Service	0
Community Sport	Activities & Programming	0
	Customer Service	0
SUPPORT TEAM		
Support Team	Customer Service	1
	Policy General	9

- 152 complaints were received by NALL during the year.
- The majority related to the Irvine and Three Towns areas but this was expected given The Portal and Auchenharvie Leisure Centre are situated in these locales and attract higher visitor numbers compared to other NALL venues/facilities.

Complaints per 1,000 visits for each department

Department	Complaint Volume	Attendances	Complaint Rate
Leisure	135	2,546,206	0.05
Physical Activity	7	221,164	0.03
Support Team	10	n/a	n/a

- The volume of complaints received is negligible compared to the number of people visiting facilities/venues.

Complaint categories by volume

Category	Volume
Facilities General	61
Facilities Cleanliness	13
Customer Service	20
Activities and Programming	48
Policy/General	10
Marketing and Promotion	0
Total	152

Three-year Complaint Category comparison

Category	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Facilities General	41	55	61
Facilities Cleanliness	13	3	13
Customer Service	95	54	20
Activities & Programming	33	46	48
Policy/General	16	33	10
Marketing/Promotion	5	4	0
Total	203	195	152

- A year on year reduction seen in complaints received over the last three years, particularly around Customer Service and Policy/General complaints.

Complaints handled at each Stage by category

Category	Stage One	Stage Two
Facilities General	31	30
Facilities Cleanliness	5	6
Customer Service	6	16
Activities and Programming	16	32
Policy/General	3	7
Marketing and Promotion	0	0
Total	61	91

- Analysis shows all complaints were answered within the 20 working day target with 62% being answered within 5 working days.

Examples of complaints received

The Company values all complaints received and uses them to inform management and development decisions going forward. Examples of complaints received over the year and the Company's response is shown in the table below.

Category	Nature of Complaint	Response/Action
Facilities General	A complaint was received regarding noise levels at Auchenhavie Leisure Centre.	Investigations showed the noise was due to a boiler. This has been maintained and managed internally to eliminate noise and an apology offered.
Customer Service	Complaint received regarding a delay in transferring a membership to a corporate membership following several requests.	An investigation identified the delay was due to discounts for the specific company no longer being offered. Apology given, processes updated and discount was honoured given the circumstances.
Activities and Programming	A customer complained about the inconsistency of floats during fun swims. Concerns were also raised regarding employee attitude.	Apology offered for lack of consistency and customer care. Employees receiving on-going training to avoid re-occurrence.
Policy/General	A complaint was received regarding the no snorkel policy. The customer felt the policy was more relevant for children and would like to use a snorkel during early bird lanes or non-busy lunchtimes.	The customer was informed the decision to have a blanket ban on snorkels in our pools is an industry standard and that snorkels should be used at organised snorkelling or sub aqua sessions. Although the policy will be maintained, an apology was offered for the inconvenience caused.

12 SPSO referrals

The table below details the type and volume of complaints relating to North Ayrshire Council that were referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in 2018/19.

Type of complaint	Volume
Building Control	1
Economic Development	1
Education	4
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1
Finance	7
Housing	11
Land & Property	3
Legal & Admin	2
Planning	3
Recreation & Leisure	3
Roads & Transport	1
Social Work	3
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	1

- The SPSO received 1,301 complaints about Scottish Local Authorities during the year and 41 (3%) related to North Ayrshire Council. The referral rate is consistent with previous years (which is typically between 2% to 3%).
- The table shows the highest number of referrals made to the SPSO about the Council related to Housing but this is unsurprising given a fifth of all LA referrals made to the SPSO related to Housing services.

The outcomes of the North Ayrshire Council complaints referred to the SPSO are noted below.

Stage	Outcome	Volume
Advice	Not duly made or withdrawn	3
	Premature	8
Early Resolution	Not duly made or withdrawn	1
	Out of jurisdiction (discretionary)	2
	Out of jurisdiction (non-discretionary)	2
	Outcome not achievable	1
	Premature	2
	Proportionality	17
	Resolved	2
Investigation	Fully upheld	0
	Some upheld	0
	Not upheld	0
	Resolved	0

- All SPSO referrals from North Ayrshire complainants were resolved at the Advice or Early Resolution stages. No complaints were taken to Investigation stage.
- Many of the referrals made were withdrawn by the complainants, out of SPSO jurisdiction or premature i.e. complainants approached the SPSO before exhausting the Council's Two Stage process.
- Many Early Resolution referrals were considered under proportionality meaning the SPSO decided it would not be proportionate to investigate the complaints given the need to use public resources effectively. Instances include where evidence suggests the Council has already carried out a thorough investigation or the sole outcome being sought by the complainant is not one the SPSO can achieve by investigating and making recommendations.
- The SPSO investigated two complaints at Early Resolution stage, both relating to the Health & Social Care Partnership. The SPSO determined one complaint was not upheld and the other was upheld with one recommendation.

More details regarding complaint referrals for North Ayrshire Council can be found on the SPSO website at [**https://www.spsso.org.uk/decision-reports**](https://www.spsso.org.uk/decision-reports).

13 Glossary

Term	Explanation
Stage One	Stage One (aka <i>Frontline Resolution</i>) aims to resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any employee may deal with complaints at this stage and they can be resolved via any channel. The main principle is to seek resolution at the earliest opportunity and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. Stage One complaints must be responded to within 5 working days unless an extension (a maximum of 5 additional working days or 10 if the complaint relates to Social Work) is requested and approved by a senior manager. The Council should, however, always aim to resolve these types of complaints within 5 working days.
Stage Two	Not all complaints are suitable for Frontline Resolution and not all complaints will be satisfactorily resolved at that stage. Complaints therefore handled at Stage Two (aka <i>Investigation</i>) typically require a detailed examination before the Council can state its position. These complaints may already have been considered at Stage One, or they may have been identified from the outset as being complex, serious or high risk and needing immediate investigation. The investigation under a Stage Two should establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents our final position. Stage Two complaints must be responded to within 20 working days unless an extension is approved by senior manager in conjunction with the customer. Stage Two complaints require a written response, signed by a senior manager.

Complaint criteria

When an expression of dissatisfaction is received the Council determines if the issue falls into one of six complaint categories:

- A service the Council should be providing is not being provided (or is not available)
- A request for a service was provided but not to an appropriate standard
- A request for service has not been answered or actioned within the agreed timescale
- A Council employee was rude, unhelpful or unprofessional
- A Council employee did not attend an appointment or call-out on a date/time agreed
- The complaint relates to a policy (internal or external)

If the issue being raised relates to one or more of the above, the matter is considered a complaint and will be recorded and handled as such. If not, the matter will be handled as a request for a service, observation or enquiry and actioned accordingly.

END OF REPORT