
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

29 January 2019

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Title: **Q2 2018 YTD Complaint Report**

Purpose: To inform the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of the Council's complaint performance and the volumes and trends of complaints received covering the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 (referred to in the report as Q2 2018 YTD).

Recommendation: That the Committee note the report and the performance information provided.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 983 complaints were closed during the period.
- 1.2 The percentage of complaints closed on time, as well as the average number of days to close complaints under both Stages, was better than the national benchmark targets during the period.

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 the indicators can be found in the attached report.

2.2 Volume of complaints received and closed



2.3 Complaints closed as each Stage

The table below details the number of complaints handled at both Stages during the period:

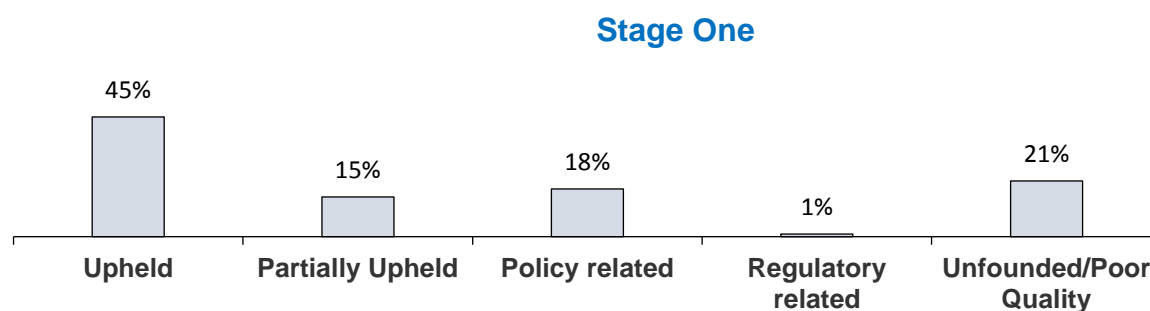
	Stage One	Stage Two
Volume of complaints closed	911	72

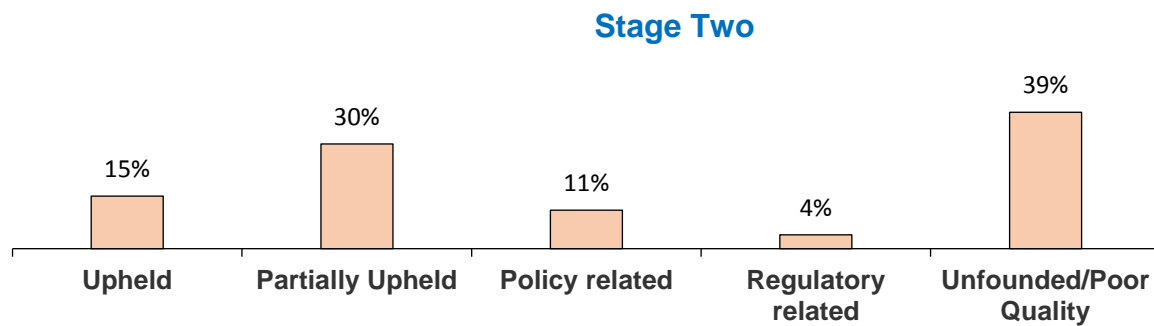
The table below shows the breakdown per Directorate:

Directorate	Stage One	Stage Two
Place	646	19
Finance & Corporate Support	143	12
Health & Social Care Partnership	44	28
Education & Youth Employment	63	7
Economy & Communities	11	4
Chief Executive/Democratic Services	4	2
Total	911	72

2.3.1 Most complaints are typically straightforward in nature or easy to resolve and although there is no target for the volume handled under each Stage, the Council always seeks to maximise resolution at Stage One.

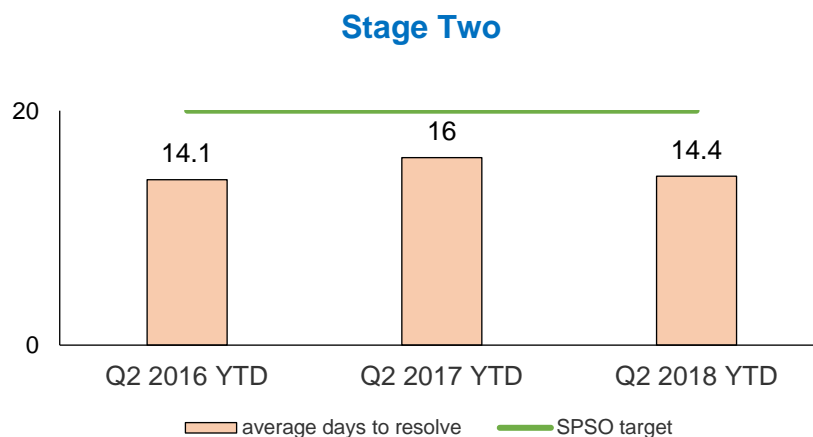
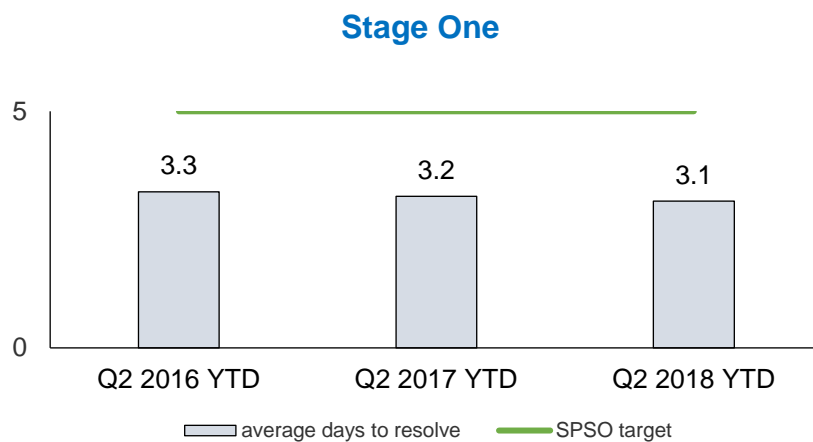
2.4 Complaint outcomes





2.4.1 Further information regarding complaint outcomes can be found in the attached report.

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



2.5.1 The national target for the average number of days to close Stage One complaints is 5 days or less and for Stage Two complaints it is 20 days or less.

2.5.2 The Council's performance was better than the national target.

2.6 *Complaints closed within timescale*



2.6.1 The national target for closing Stage One complaints on time is 80% and above and for Stage Two complaints it is 85% and above.

2.6.2 The Council surpassed both targets during the period by 13% and 9% respectively.

2.7 *Complaint timescale extensions*

2.7.1 A total of 44 complaints had their timescales extended during the period and most were Stage Ones. The complaints related to various services in a number of Directorates.

2.7.2 Reasons for extending timescales included complainants being unavailable to assist with complaints, information being awaited from others to support investigations and the complexity of the complaints.

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

2.8.1 As a result of complaints received during the period, changes and improvements made included procedural and process amendments, targeted training and the introduction of new processes.

3. **Proposals**

3.1 It is proposed the Committee notes the report and the performance information listed in Section 2.

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 a focus on analysing trends and identifying improvements.</p> <p>Support and guidance from the Complaint & Feedback 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 Complaint Handling Satisfaction Surveys are issued to customers who have complained in order to capture their views on the Two Stage CHP and how Services handled their complaints. Full survey results are detailed in the end of year complaint report.



Laura Friel
Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Support)

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

Background Papers

See attached



Complaint Report Q2 2018 YTD



Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
1 Volume of complaints closed	4
2 Complaints closed on time	6
3 Volume of complaints not closed on time per Directorate	7
4 Key topics for upheld/partially upheld complaints	9
5 Average time in working days for a full response	10
6 Extended complaints	13
7 Complaint Outcomes	14
8 SPSO Indicators - Thematic Reviews	15
9 Compliments	17
10 Improvements made	18
12 Glossary	19

Introduction

This report details the Council's complaint handling performance covering the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018 (referred in the report as Q2 2018 YTD). Performance is measured through a number of Scottish Public Services Ombudsman indicators, some of which have national targets.

North Ayrshire Council define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction from a member of the public about actions, or lack of actions, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council.

To address these, 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.

Complaints must be made within six months of the date the complainant first knew of the problem, unless there are special circumstances that would cause this timescale to be extended.

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

1 Volume of complaints closed

983 complaints were closed during the period and the table below provides a breakdown per Directorate:



The following tables highlight the complaint volumes for each Stage:

Place	Stage One	Stage Two
Building Services	96	0
Facilities Management	4	0
Housing	33	7
Property Management & Investment	50	4
Roads	26	2
Streetscene	95	1
Transport	0	2
Waste	342	3
Total	646	19

Finance & Corporate Support	Stage One	Stage Two
Benefits	20	0
Customer Services	70	1
Finance Services	1	0
Multi-Service	10	7
Revenues	39	4
Risk & Insurance	3	0
Total	143	12

Health & Social Care Partnership	Stage One	Stage Two
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	20	17
Health & Community Care	16	7
Mental Health	5	4
Support Services	3	0
Total	44	28

Education & Youth Employment	Stage One	Stage Two
Education HQ	29	2
Schools	34	5
Total	63	7

Economy & Communities	Stage One	Stage Two
Information & Culture	4	1
Planning	3	1
Protective Services	3	2
Regeneration	1	0
Total	11	4

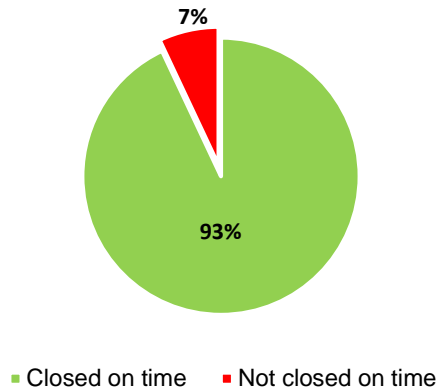
Chief Executive/Democratic Services	Stage One	Stage Two
Chief Executive Office	0	1
Licencing	3	1
Legal	1	0
Total	4	2

- Although there is no target for the volume of complaints handled under each Stage, the Council seeks to maximise closure at Stage One and 93% were handled at this Stage during the period.
- 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 responses the complaints are escalated to Stage Two and handled by Senior Managers in Education HQ. The reason the data in the table above does not support this is because some Stage One complaints related to school employees and were handled by Senior Managers from the outset and not by the schools themselves.

2 Complaints closed on time

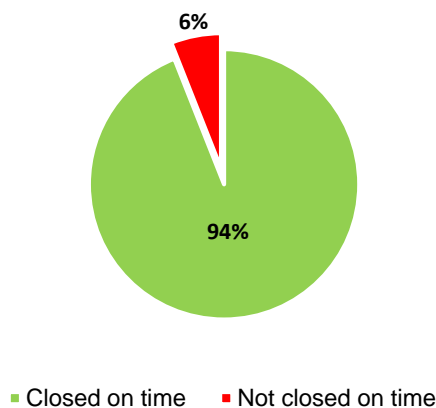
The percentage of complaints closed on time during the period under both Stages are noted below:

Stage Ones



- The Council closed 93% of Stage One complaints on time during the period. The national target is 80% and above.
- The 93% value includes extended complaints that met their new due dates¹.

Stage Twos



- The Council closed 94% of Stage Two complaints on time during the period. The national target is 85% and above.
- The 94% value includes extended complaints that met their new due dates².

¹ Stage One complaints can be extended an additional 5 working days (10 if they relate to social work)

² Stage Two complaints can be extended to any agreed date in the future

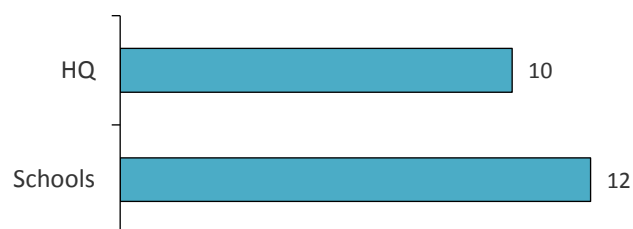
3 Volume of complaints not closed on time per Directorate

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

Stage Ones

Notes

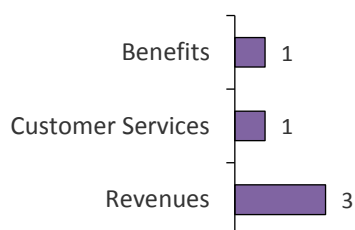
Education



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

Some complaints required further investigation or were received during school closure periods so could have had their timescales extended or been escalated to Stage Two.

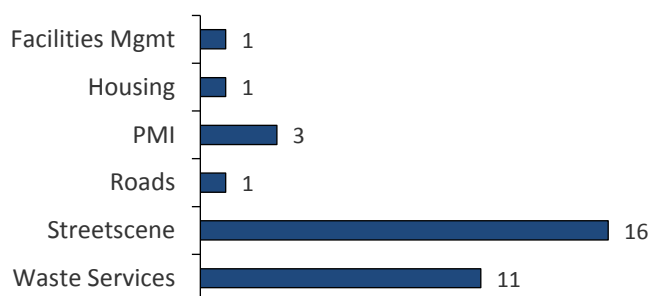
Finance & Corporate Support



The Benefits complaint and two Revenues complaints breached timescale due to delays with the complaints reaching the services.

The remaining Revenues complaint and the Customer Services (Contact Centre) complaint did not have the reasons why they breached noted in the closure forms so it is unclear what caused the delays resolving them.

Place



Half of all complaints that breached timescale across the Place directorate (relating to Streetscene and Waste Services) did not have the reasons why noted in the closure forms so it is unclear what caused the delays.

The other complaints that breached were various in nature and included delays in signoff for responses, complaints requiring further investigation, customers being unavailable 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.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)



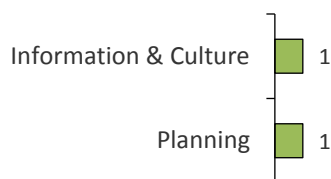
One Health & Community Care complaint breached due to a home visit being required to discuss the complaint with the service user and one Children & Families complaint breached due to a breakdown in communication.

The remaining four complaints did not have the reasons why they breached noted in the closure forms so it is unclear what caused the delays.

Stage Twos

Notes

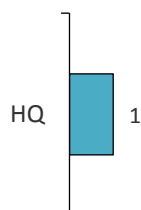
Economy & Communities



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.

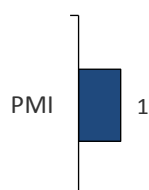
A delay in the final response letter being approved resulted in one Planning complaint breached its due date.

Education



Due to school holidays and a parent being unavailable to assist with the investigation, one Education HQ complaint breached its due date. This complaint could have had its timescale extended.

Place



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

- 53% of all Stage One complaints that did not meet timescale had no reasons recorded in the closure forms why they breached. Reasons for breaching should always be recorded to allow trends and patterns to be identified.
- Some Services handled a small number of complex complaints at Stage One from the outset. This was due to human error and will be addressed through targeted training.
- Some complaints breached because no handovers took place. When a complaint handler is unavailable processes should be in place to allow complaints they were investigating to continue to be progressed.
- Stage Two complaints can have their 20 working day timescale extended if certain conditions are met. 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 Key topics for upheld/partially upheld complaints

Key topics for upheld or partially upheld complaints within some Services during the period 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 topics
HQ / Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service provision

Finance & Corporate Support

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

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

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

Place

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Building Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality issues (work incomplete or poor workmanship)• Follow up (not done yet)
PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital Programme (planned works for tenants)• Gas Central Heating (including maintenance)
Streetscene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grass/verge cutting• Cemetery management• Weed killing
Waste Services (Operations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missed bins (primarily brown bins)• Missed pullouts (primarily brown bins)• Employee Actions

- Employee Actions appears as a key topic for some Services, however the definition is broad and has been used where customers perceive 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 Services did identify unacceptable behaviour, appropriate action will have been taken to address.

Using 'Other' as a complaint topic

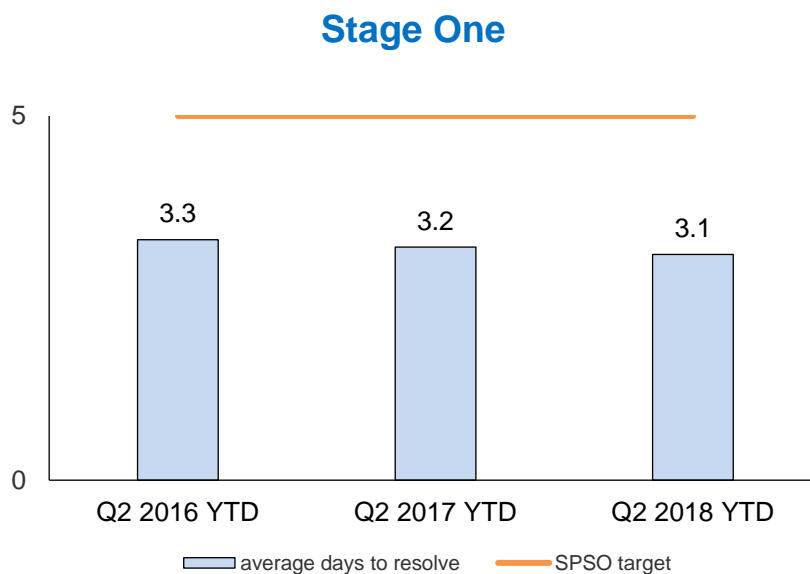
If a complaint is received but there is no topic for it, 'Other' can be selected. This option was used 267 times (27% of all complaints logged) during the period and there were many instances where no details were provided to support why it had been selected. There were also some instances where a topic was listed but 'Other' selected instead. Services therefore need to be mindful that:

- where 'Other' is selected as the topic, the complaint recorder should always add a brief note to support why it has been chosen. This will help determine if additional topics for the Service are required and help assist with trend analysis.
- Employees who record complaints (particularly Customer Services Advisers) should fully review the topic list to ensure the complaint topic is not listed before selecting 'Other'.

Should this issue continue, further analysis will be undertaken and the topic options reviewed to determine if they remain fit for purpose.

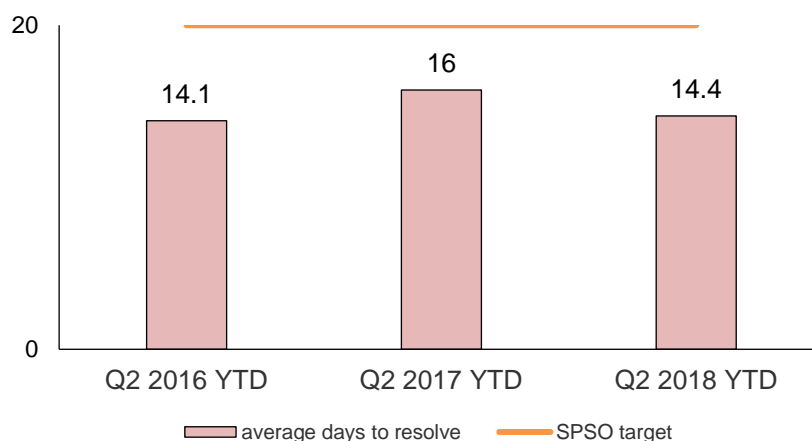
5 Average time in working days for a full response

The average time in working days to close complaints under both Stages during the period are noted below. The Q2 YTD averages for 2016 and 2017 have been provided for comparison purposes:



- The average time in working days for the Council to close Stage One complaints during the period was 3.1 days. The national target is 5 working days or less.

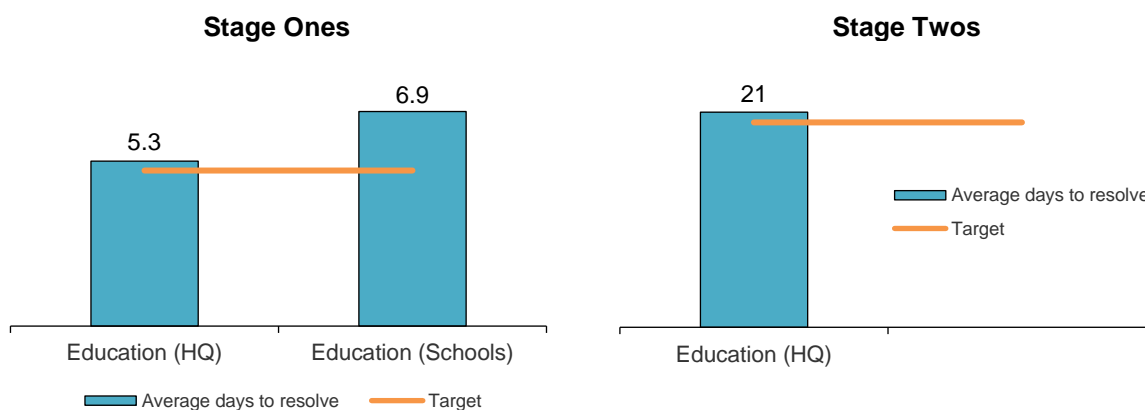
Stage Two



- The average time in working days for the Council to close Stage Two complaints during the period was 14.4 days. The national target is 20 working days or less.

The 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.

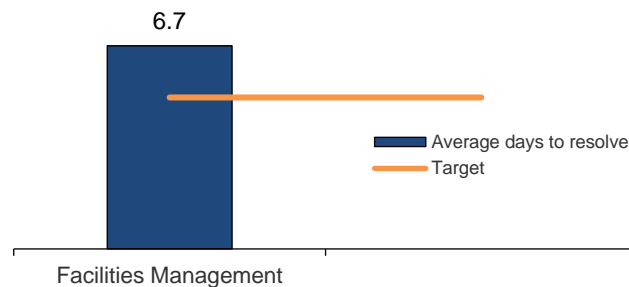
Education & Youth Employment



- 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 had no details added why they breached timescale so it cannot be ascertained what caused the delays.
- Out of all Stage Two HQ complaints that were handled, only one was closed outside the 20 working day timescale and this resulted in the target being missed. This was due to a parent being unable to meet the complaint handler to discuss the issues. Consideration should have been given to extending the timescale for the complaint given there was a justified reason.

Place

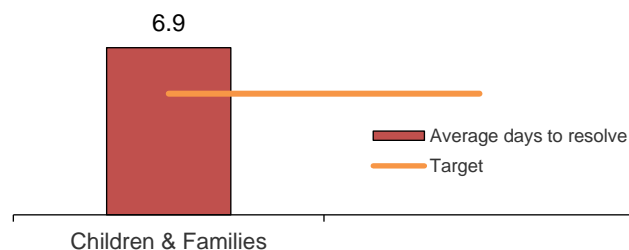
Stage Ones



- A Stage One complaint for Facilities Management did not meet the 5 working day timescale resulting 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 (the issues were subsequently addressed).

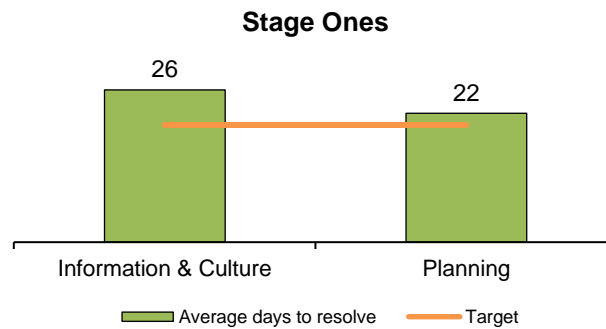
HSCP (Social Work complaints)

Stage Ones



- The Children, Families & Criminal Justice service resolved many Stage One complaints during the period but as three were closed outside the 5 working day timescale, this resulted in the target not being met. One complaint breached as it was not picked up in the system due to an administrative error and two had no details added why they breached so it could not be ascertained what caused the delays.

Economy and Communities



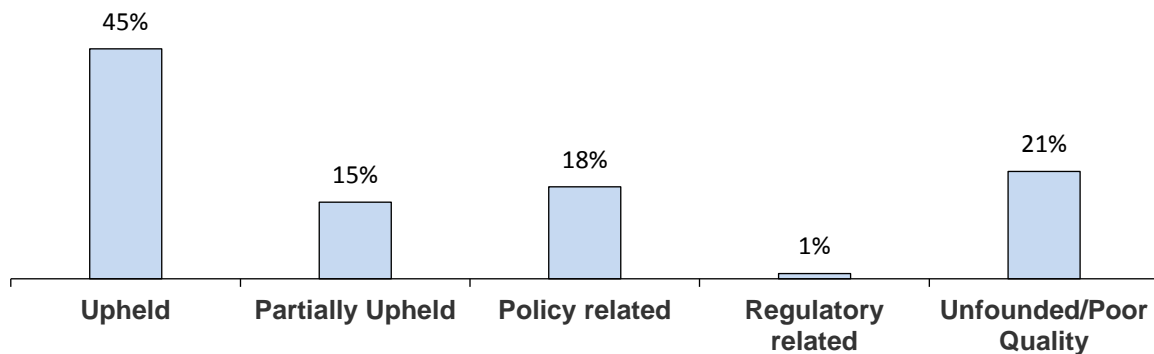
- Information & Culture handled only one Stage Two complaint during the period but as it was closed on working day 26 the target was not met. The complaint breached due to employee annual leave hindering progress of the investigation. As mentioned earlier in the report, when a complaint handler is unavailable processes should be in place to allow complaints to continue to be progressed.
- Planning also handled only one Stage Two complaint but as it was closed on working day 22 the target was also not met. The complaint breached due to a delay in the response letter being approved by senior management. As mentioned earlier in the report, complaint response letters should be approved and issued promptly to reduce the number of complaints breaching timescale this way.

6 Extended complaints

- 44 complaints had their timescales extended during the period and most were Stage Ones. The complaints related to a number of services including those in Commercial Services, Physical Environment, Education and the Health & Social Care Partnership.
- There were sound reasons for extending including complainants being unavailable to assist with investigations, information being awaited from 3rd parties to support investigations and the complexity of the complaints.
- Of the 44 complaints extended, only 4 did not meet their new due dates.

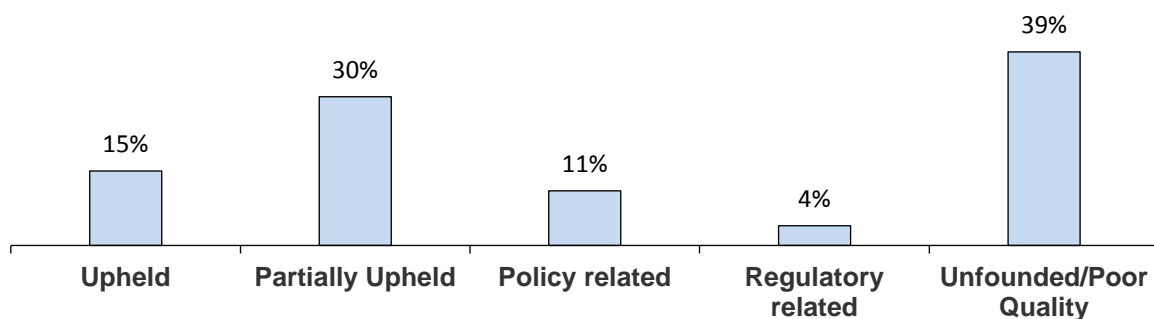
7 Complaint Outcomes

Stage One



- Of the 45% of complaints that were fully upheld, one third related to waste collections and the remainder related to various services and issues.
- The policy related complaints were diverse in nature and related to internal and external policies.

Stage Two



- A large volume of Stage Two complaints were, upon investigation, unsubstantiated or unfounded.

Improvements made as a result of upheld complaints are published on the North Ayrshire Council website under the banner 'You Said We Did'. Improvements made during the period related to a number of different issues (some unique to the complainants) and no specific trends or themes were identified.

8 SPSO Indicators - Thematic Reviews

Thematic reviews based on the SPSO performance indicators will be introduced into future complaint reports to pinpoint, examine and record patterns (or themes) with our complaint data.

The first thematic review relates to *Performance Indicator 2 – Complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two as a percentage of all complaints closed*.

This indicator reports:

1. the number of complaints closed at Stage One as % of all complaints
2. the number of complaints closed at Stage Two as % of all complaints
3. the number of complaints closed at Stage Two after escalation as % of all complaints (i.e. complaints where customers were unhappy with their Stage One responses)

Analysis

The tables below shows the volume resolved under each Stage in Q2 2018 YTD:

Volume of complaints received	983
-------------------------------	-----

Volume resolved at Stage One	910
% resolved at Stage One	92.5%

Volume resolved at Stage Two	67
% resolved at Stage Two	6.8%

Volume resolved at Stage Two after escalation from Stage One	6
% of Stage One complaints escalated to Stage Two	0.6%

- The majority of complaints the Council handle are Stage Ones
- A very small number of complaints are being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

The Scottish national average for percentage of complaints resolved at Stage One in 2017/18 was **89%** and statistics provided by the other Scottish Councils shows many did not meet this average. Our assessment of this suggests:

- These Councils receive more complex, high risk or high-profile complaints than North Ayrshire
- Customers are less likely to take part in the Stage One process in these Councils than in North Ayrshire
- More customers are dissatisfied with the Stage One resolutions being provided by these Councils than in North Ayrshire
- These Councils are handling fewer complaints at Stage One due to insufficient complaint handling knowledge or ineffective processes.

Reviewing the percentage of complaints resolved at Stage One over the last 3 years, North Ayrshire Council has met or exceeded the 2017/18 Scottish national average each year:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18 National target
Volume resolved at Stage One	91%	91%	89%	89%
Volume resolved at Stage Two	8%	8%	10%	8%
Volume of Stage Twos after escalation from Stage One	<1%	<1%	<1%	3%

Based on this analysis there are no concerns with the percentage of complaints being handled under each Stage or the volume being escalated from Stage One to Stage Two.

Conclusion

The Council are mainly handling complaints under the correct Stages and the percentages handled at Stage One, Stage Two and those that have been escalated have been consistent over the last three years.

Next Review

The next themed review will relate to *Performance Indicator 3 – The number of complaints upheld/partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints responded to in full.*

9 Compliments

Over 290 compliments were recorded across the Directorates during the period and the table below details the volumes:

Directorate	Volume
Chief Executive/Democratic Services	2
Economy & Communities	43
Finance & Corporate Support	64
Health & Social Care Partnership	65
Place	115

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.

The word cloud below details some of the feedback employees have received:



10 Improvements made

Some of the improvements made by Services during the period included the following:

- ✓ As a result of a complaint from a resident that their waste bin had been emptied but left in a position so it was blocking their driveway, collection crews were reminded of the process to follow when replacing waste bins.
- ✓ Due to a miscommunication with a customer regarding a window repair, a Building Services supervisor issued a communication to all tradesmen reminding them of the repair timescales as governed by the repairs policy and our out of hours service also addressed the issue through their training programme.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ As a result of refuse bins not being emptied in a street, Waste Services agreed to update an internal digital noticeboard each day if there are any missed streets or issues as a result of no access. This has allowed Contact Centre Advisers to inform customers what caused the missed collections (if they call in) and reduce complaints being raised.
- ✓ A customer completed a change of address and wanted the direct debit to remain in place but this was not done and the customer received a reminder for the new account. As a result, training took place with the relevant employees and steps introduced to ensure additional checks are undertaken regarding the transferring of direct debits.
- ✓ As a result of complaints about waste being left in streets when refuse bins are being emptied, collection crews were reminded to clear up spillages from bins or the waste vehicle and to report larger spillages for clearance by Streetscene.

Complaint Handling Review

Our Two Stage complaint handling procedure is designed to improve relationships with our customers/residents, enhance our reputation and improve our services by learning from complaints. The procedure is also designed to support our employees to do their jobs better.

As it has been several years since the complaint handling procedure was introduced, a review will be undertaken to ensure our complaint handling processes remain robust.

The review will include reviewing our corporate Two Stage complaint handling procedure, complaint handling guidance, complaint reporting and other processes.

Outputs from the review will be reported in the 2018/19 annual complaint report.

11 Glossary

Term

Explanation

Stage One

Stage One (aka *Frontline Resolution*) 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 *Investigation*) 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 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