
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

21 March 2024

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Title: 2023/2024 Half Yearly 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 the first six months of Financial Year 2023/24.

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

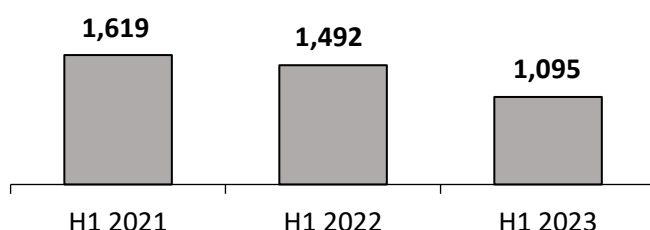
1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report details complaint handling performance relating to North Ayrshire Council covering the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 and is referred to in the report as H1 2023.
- 1.2 To allow comparisons to be made, the report also details some complaint data relating to previous years' half yearly reports (H1 2021 and H1 2022).
- 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. More information relating to the indicators can be found in the detailed half yearly report attached at Appendix 1.

2.2 *Volume of complaints received and closed*



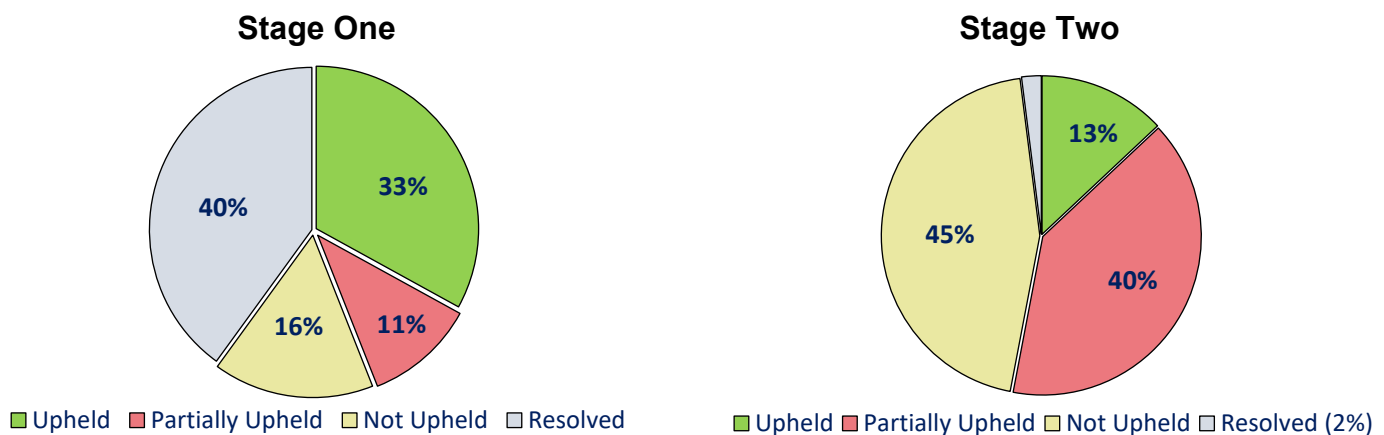
- 2.2.1 A 27% decrease has been noted in complaints received/closed when compared to the same period last year.

2.3 Complaints closed at each Stage

	H1 2023
Stage One	1012
Stage Two	83

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 compared to Stage Two, which reduces the impact on complaint handler time and the possibility of SPSO referrals.

2.4 Complaint outcomes

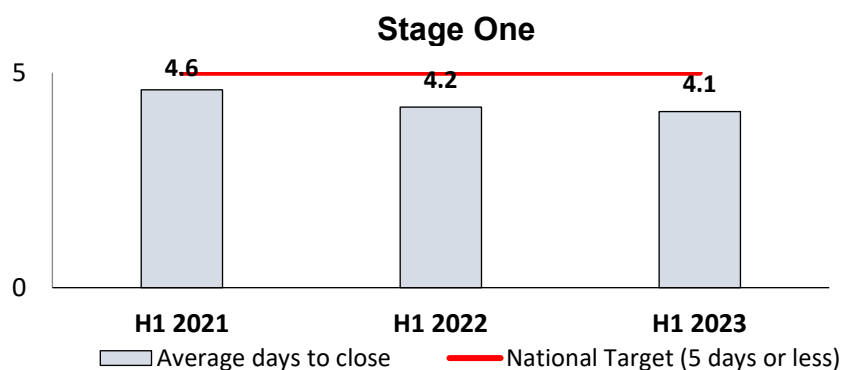


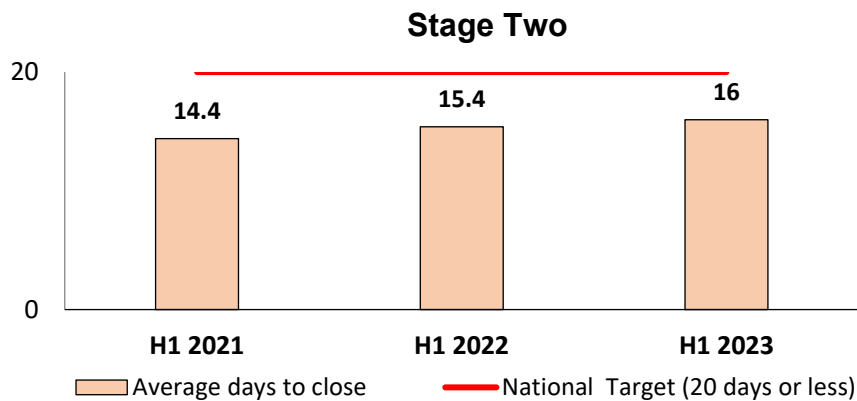
2.4.1 Up to 31 March 2021, a complaint that meets our complaint criteria could be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. From 1 April 2021 a fourth outcome became available to use called 'Resolved'. Resolved complaints are where the Council has taken action to address a problem or issue without making a decision on whether there were any failings (this would happen where we agree a solution with the complainant at the outset without needing to actually investigate the complaint).

2.4.2 Analysis shows the majority of Resolved complaints related to missed bin collections, where complainants simply wanted their bins collected.

2.4.3 Many complaints not upheld related to policies, regulations or complaints that were unfounded.

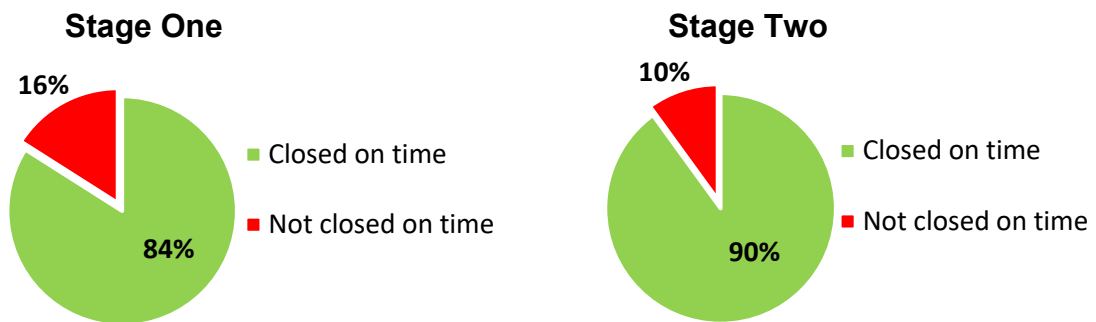
2.5 Average time in working days for a full response at each Stage





2.5.1 The average time in working days for a response under both Stages is better than 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. The Council’s response was better than the national target set. The national target for complaints closed under Stage Two is 85% or above and again the Council’s response was better than the set target.

2.6.2 Further details of complaints not closed on time are contained in the attached report.

2.7 Trends identified from upheld/partially upheld complaints

2.7.1 Key complaint topics for upheld or partially upheld complaints are detailed on pages 9 and 10 of the attached report.

2.8 Changes or Improvements made as a result of complaints

2.8.1 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 period and a selection are noted in page 14 of the attached report.

2.9 Compliments

2.9.1 The Council received and recorded over 100 compliments during the period. Some praised specific individuals or teams, some related to more than one Service and some

were raised by employees complimenting other employees. A selection can be found in page 15 of the attached report.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed the Committee approves the report and recognises the Council's complaint handling performance for the first six months of Financial Year 2023/2024.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 None.

Human Resources

- 4.2 None.

Legal

- 4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 None.

Climate Change and Carbon

- 4.5 None.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 The Two Stage Complaint Handling Procedure supports the Council's key priority of delivering more effective and efficient service provision. It demonstrates commitment by identifying trends and focussing on service improvements whenever possible for North Ayrshire residents, customers and visitors.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 None.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 None.

Aileen Craig
Head of Service for Democratic Services

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

Background Papers
2023/24 Half Year Complaint Report



2023/24 Half Year Complaint Report



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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 members of the public:-

1

Stage One complaints (also known as *Frontline Resolution*) are straightforward, non-complex complaints the Council can address 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 handle these.

2

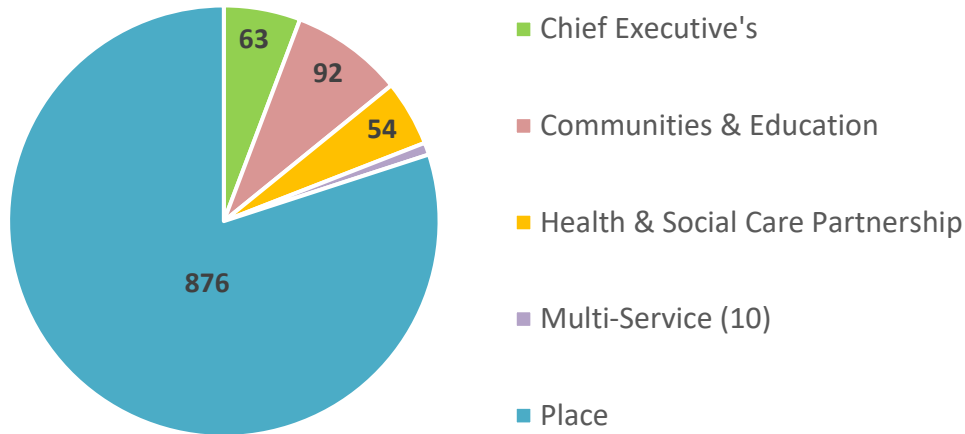
Stage Two complaints (also known as *Investigations*) are complaints the Council are typically unable to address at Stage One and require more time to carry out further investigation. This may be because the complaint is complex, serious or high risk. The Council has up to 20 working days to address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

This report details the Council's complaint handling performance covering the first six months of financial year 2023 (1 April to 30 September 2023) and is referred to in the report as **H1 2023**. Performance is measured via several Scottish Public Services Ombudsman indicators (some of which have national targets) and complaint data relating to previous years has been included in certain sections to allow comparisons to be made.

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

1 Volume of complaints closed

1,117 complaints were received during the period and 1,095 closed. The chart below provides a breakdown of the closed complaints per Directorate:



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

Place	Stage One	Stage Two
Building Services	136	6
Community Wealth Building	-	1
Housing	59	8
Planning	1	2
Property Management & Investment	44	3
Protective Services	9	1
Regeneration	-	1
Roads	24	2
Streetscene	68	1
Sustainability	1	2
Waste Services	503	4
Total	845	31

Multi-Service	Stage One	Stage Two
Complaints involving more than one service	1	9
Total	1	9

Health & Social Care Partnership	Stage One	Stage Two
Children, Families & Criminal Justice	12	2
Health & Community Care	22	6
Mental Health	3	5
Support Services	3	1
Total	40	14

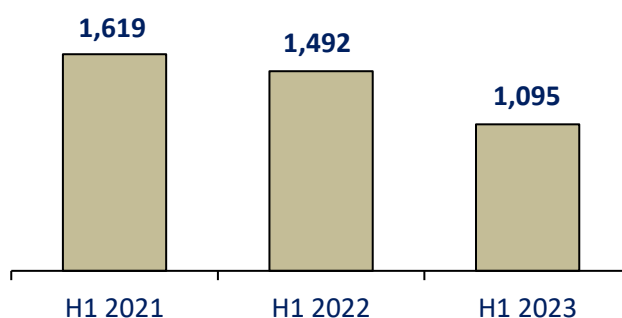
Communities & Education	Stage One	Stage Two
Community Learning & Development	1	-
Education (HQ)	4	3
Education (Schools)	50	19
Facilities Management	9	-
Information & Culture	4	2
Total	68	24

Chief Executive's	Stage One	Stage Two
Chief Executive Office	1	-
Customer Services	49	4
Finance	1	-
IT	1	-
Legal	6	1
Total	58	5

- 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 92% were handled at this Stage during the period.
- Some Services handled all their complaints at Stage One.
- Whilst 46% of all complaints closed related to Waste Services (the majority relating to missed collections), the Service empty over 102,000 household waste bins each week. As this equates to approximately 2.5 million collections during the period, 0.02% of these collections resulted in complaints being raised. More information regarding the Waste Services complaints can be found later in this report.
- Multi-Service complaints have a table of their own as they are not attributed to one Service.

Year on Year comparison

The graph below shows a comparison of the volume of complaints closed over the half year period in the last three years:



The table below shows the volume breakdown for each Directorate over the last three years:

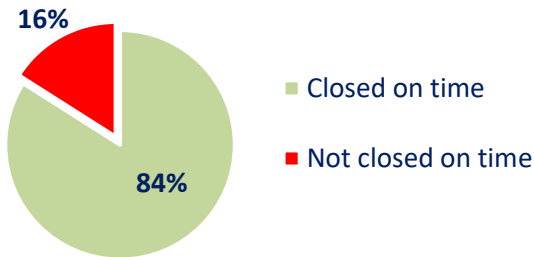
Directorate	H1 2021	H1 2022	H1 2023	Variance (2022 – 2023)
Chief Executive's	172	103	63	-39%
Communities & Education	46	65	92	+41%
HSCP (Social Work complaints)	83	60	54	-10%
Place	1,306	1,259	876	-30%
Total	1,607*	1,487*	1,085*	-27%

*Multi-service complaints have been excluded to allow true Directorate comparisons

- There has been a significant decrease (27%) in complaints received/closed when comparing H1 2023 with the previous year.

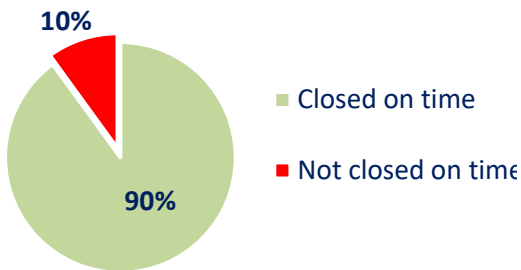
2 Volume of complaints closed on time at both Stages

Stage One



- The national target for closing Stage One complaints on time is 80% and above.
- The volume closed on time includes extended complaints that met their new due dates.

Stage Two



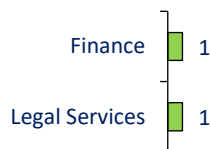
- The national target for closing Stage Two complaints on time is 85% and above.
- The volume closed on time includes extended complaints that met their new due dates.

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 One

Chief Executive's

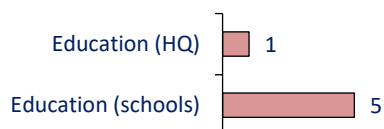


Notes

One Finance complaint did not meet timescale due to a communication breakdown because an employee crucial to the investigation was unavailable.

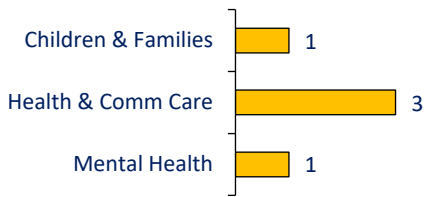
The Legal Services complaint that did not meet timescale was due to workload pressures.

Communities & Education



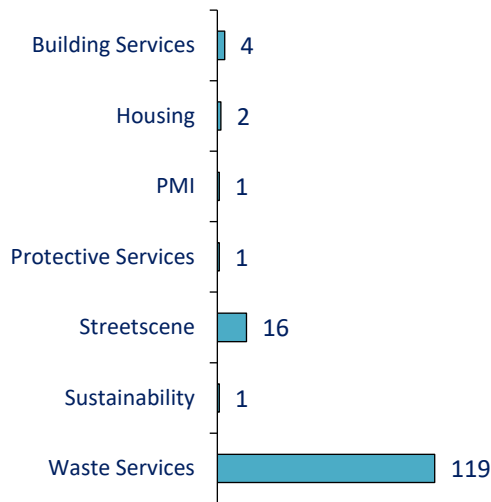
These 6 complaints breached because complainants were unavailable to assist with investigations and some were received during the summer break. Such complaints should have been escalated to Stage Two and the due dates extended appropriately.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)



There were various reasons these complaints did not meet timescale, including complaint handlers, employees and complainants not being available to progress or assist with investigations.

Place



Complaints in Place that did not meet timescale was due to a variety of reasons, including complaint handlers, complainants and 3rd parties being unavailable to assist with investigations, reduced resources and employee availability.

Regarding Waste Services complaints that did not meet timescale, additional information is below.

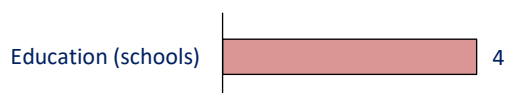
Waste Services complaints

The first six months of Financial Year 2023 were challenging due to increased sickness absence levels in Waste collections, which resulted in operational difficulties. Absence rates during the summer period were particularly high and the service robustly managed this, resulting in absence rates improving.

A manufacturing issue affecting purple bins led to a high number of complaints during the period. This is an ongoing contractual issue and while the service have endeavoured to meet purple bin lid replacement requests, this has unfortunately led to an increase in complaints.

Stage Two

Communities & Education



No reasons were provided as to why these 4 complaints breached their response due dates.

HSCP (Social Work complaints)



Whilst this complaint breached the 20-working day timescale by a couple of days, no reason was provided as to why it was not closed within timescale.

Place



The Planning complaint breached timescale due to employee availability.

No reasons were provided as to why the 2 Building Services complaints breached their response due dates.

4 Key complaint topics

Key topics for upheld and partially upheld complaints for Services are listed below. Services will not be listed if there were low complaint volumes that did not allow meaningful analysis.

Chief Executives

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Customer Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council tax issues • Employee actions (alleged or perceived)

Communities & Education

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Education (HQ and Schools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitive issues relating to teachers and/or pupils • Service delivery/provision • Employee actions (alleged or perceived)

HSCP (Social Work complaints)

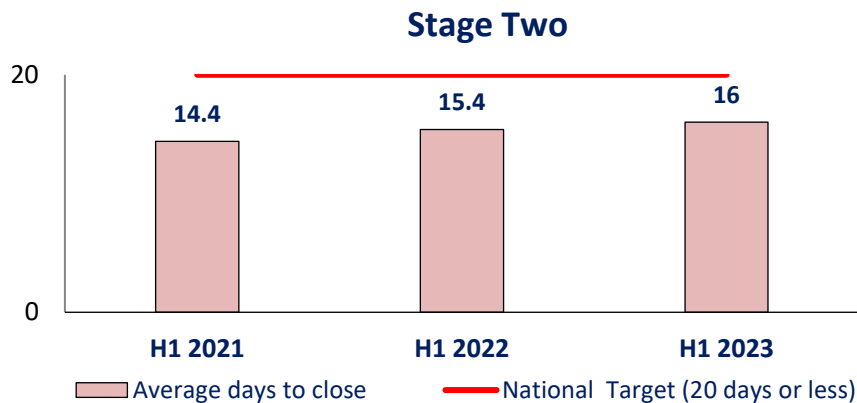
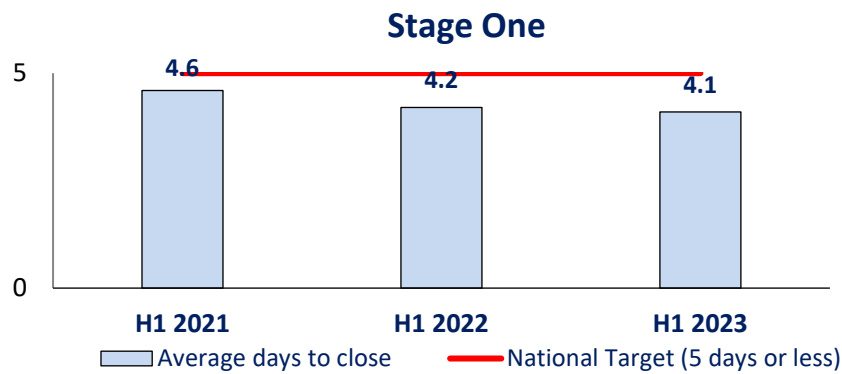
Service	Key complaint topic(s)
All Services (Children & Families, Health & Community Care, Mental Health)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service delivery/provision • Employee actions (alleged or perceived)

Place

Service	Key complaint topic(s)
Building Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow Up appointments • Quality of work issues
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estate Management
PMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned works for tenants • Gas Central Heating issues
Streetscene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grass/verge/hedge cutting issues • Employee actions (alleged or perceived)
Waste Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee actions (alleged or perceived) • Issues with new bin deliveries • Missed waste bin collections (all colours) • Missed assisted bin collections (all colours) • Recycle scheme issues (shortage of food waste bags etc.)

5 Average time in working days for a full response

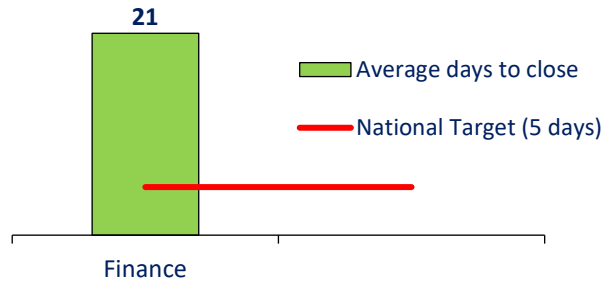
The average time in working days to close complaints under both Stages during the period is noted below. Values for previous years have been included to allow comparisons to be made and any complaints that had their timescales extended have been excluded from the calculations.



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.

Chief Executive's

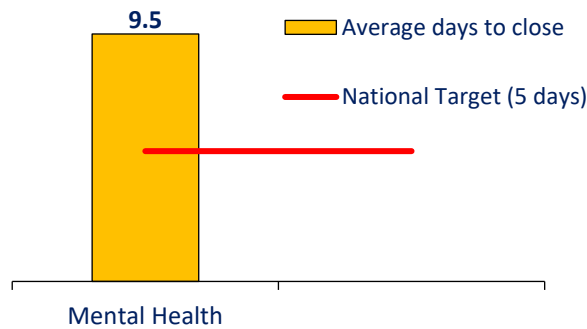
Stage One



Finance received and closed one complaint on working day 21. The complaint breached due to a communication breakdown because an employee crucial to the investigation was unavailable.

Health & Social Care Partnership

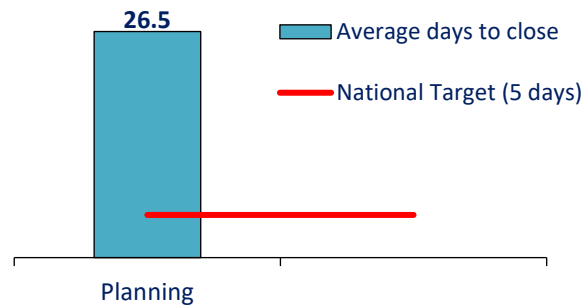
Stage One



A Mental Health complaint was closed on working day 15 due to the complainant and an employee relevant to the investigation both being unavailable.

Place

Stage Two



A Planning complaint was closed on working day 47 due to a key employee instrumental in the complaint not being available.

6 Extended complaints

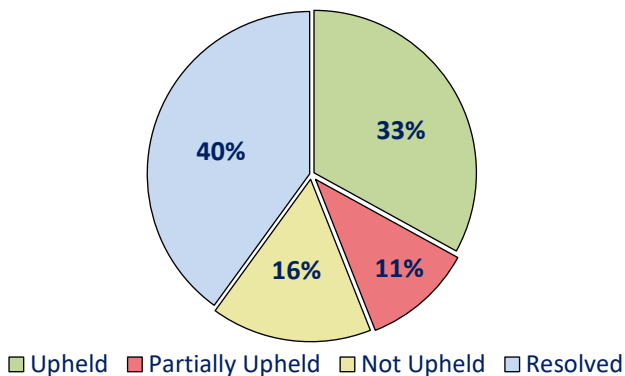
- 39 complaints had their timescales extended during the period (28 at Stage One and 11 at Stage Two). The complaints related to multiple services across all Directorates.
- There were numerous reasons for extending, including complainants and employees being unavailable to assist with investigations and additional information having to be sought to support investigation decisions.
- Of the 39 complaints that had their timescales extended, 77% were closed within their new timescales.

7 Complaint Outcomes

Up until 31 March 2021, a complaint that meets our complaint criteria could be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. From 1 April 2021, a fourth outcome became available to use called 'Resolved'. Resolved complaints are where the Council has taken action to address the problem/issue without making a decision on whether there were any failings (this would happen where we agree a solution with a complainant at the outset without needing to actually investigate the complaint).

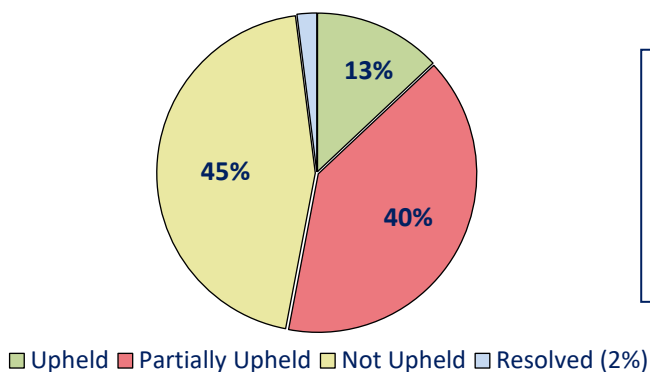
The charts below detail the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, not upheld or resolved under both Stages.

Stage One



- Of all complaints upheld and partially upheld* at Stage One, just over half related to Waste Services and in particular waste bin collections.
- Complaints closed as Resolved related to multiple services across all Directorates, with over half relating to Waste Services (again mainly missed waste bin collections). This indicates those complainants simply wanted their bins collected without the need for any investigation.
- Complaints that were not upheld related to policies, regulations or complaints that were poor quality or unfounded.

Stage Two



- Complaints that were upheld or partially upheld* related to numerous services across all Directorates.
- Complaints that were not upheld related to policies, regulations or complaints that were poor quality/unfounded.

*Partially Upheld complaints are complaints that contain more than one complaint element and at least one of them is upheld

8 Improvements made as a result of complaints

Some improvements were made as a result of complaints received during the period and a small selection is noted below.

What happened?	What we did
A trader encountered problems when completing and return a paper application to obtain a licence, including the incorrect fee being paid as the fees listed on the Council's website were out of date.	An apology was offered for the inconvenience caused, the application processed and licence granted. The Council is investigating placing the application form online to help speed up the process and the appropriate webpage has been updated with the correct fees.
A visitor to a Recycle Centre encountered problems in terms of parking at the site due to excessive public use of the site that day.	An apology was offered to the visitor for the problems encountered. The site has been upgraded to accommodate a larger volume of people wanting to recycle and a daily update was placed on the internet regarding footfall at the site to reduce disruption.
A tenant encountered problems when radiators were incorrectly fitted and applying for a disturbance allowance payment for the inconvenience.	An apology was offered and the matters addressed. Discussions then took place between the Council and the contractor regarding the importance of replacing fixtures like for like as far as is practical and to rectify errors in a timeous manner. The processing of disturbance allowance payments are also being monitored more closely to minimise inconvenience to tenants.
A resident changed their bank details and experienced problems trying to change their Council Tax Direct Debit details to the new account.	An apology was offered to the complainant and the Direct Debt set up. The complainant asked if there could be an online option to amend the bank details for Council Tax rather than just an option to set up a new one each time. The service is currently considering this feedback.
A complaint was received about grass cutting where litter was not being removed prior to cutting, which resulted in the litter being shredded and distributed across the park.	A refresher with the team responsible was arranged to ensure they are aware of their obligations in terms of litter removal and every effort will be made in the future to ensure litter is removed prior to any grass cutting activities.

9 Compliments

Over 100 compliments were recorded cross-Council during the period and whilst they cannot all be highlighted in this report, a selection is noted below.

*"My family and I like (are fond of?) everything your **Refugee Team** does for us Ukrainians. Just want to say big thank you for everything. Incredible attitude towards us and everything is easy and simple"*

*"I recently wrote to you regarding the little garden area outside Largs station. I was absolutely delighted to see that the area has been cleared of weeds and litter and bedding plants have been planted. It all looks really pretty so thank you to **Streetscene** who carried out the planting. What a difference it makes"*

*"To the staff at **Bartonholm Recycling Centre**, every time I go there I see them out helping folk get their discarded stuff away safely. And it's always done with a smile. It must be a tough job in all weathers but they're still so cheery and polite! Good on you, guys. You could deliver lessons in customer care!"*

*"I've had an issue regarding arranging a special uplift and made a number of calls to your **Contact Centre**. Every time I called your operators were very helpful and considerate. They've to be commended because every time they answer a call they don't know what that call is going to be about and have to rely on their considerable knowledge to try and answer or resolve it"*

*"I recently made a complaint to your **Property Management** department about some issues with scaffolding. Just wanted to say it got fixed immediately and you even fixed up the gate. Thank you to whoever came out to fix it. Absolute brilliant job"*

Exceptional feedback received for the **Universal Early Years service** which has resulted in an employee being invited to present at a European Conference on infant feeding.

*"Thank you to **Waste Services** for following up on a complaint I made about my waste bins being missed. They have not been missed since so thank you!"*

*"I just wanted to let you know how impressed I am with the **Recovery Development Worker**. Yesterday was the first time I spoke with him and I was really struck by his high level of motivation, honesty and very obviously genuine desire to help and support people. He is like a breath of fresh air. We don't give positive feedback often enough so wanted to let you know"*

A number of people have complimented the **Licensing Team** regarding their help and support regarding a short term let process for a number of hosts

*"I just want to highlight how fantastic the team at **Ardrossan Library** are. They go out of their way to show a welcoming, friendly environment. The time and effort they put in with kids (and adults alike) at the Monday toddler club is just brilliant. The kids look forward to it all week long"*

A resident was very happy with the service provided by **Roads** in relation to addressing a lighting fault

10 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 considered something else and actioned accordingly.

END OF REPORT