

Annual Complaints Monitoring Report



2020/21

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Foreword

I am pleased to present Dumfries and Galloway Council's Annual Complaints Monitoring Report for 2020/2021.

The Council is committed to getting things right first time and the feedback we receive from our customers and service users provides us with an invaluable understanding as to what we are doing well and where we can improve.

This report provides information mainly relating to the Council's performance in the handling of complaints against a group of performance Indicators set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, which we have been required to report on since the introduction of the national Complaints Handling Procedure in 2013.

Although there is no statutory requirement to report on Compliments as the positive feedback that customers provide to us in terms of their satisfaction with particular aspects of work by staff, the report contains some indication about the number of Compliments received across the Council during 2020/21. I am grateful to all those who have taken the time to contact us to acknowledge the effort made by staff.

We have recorded a reduction in the number of complaints received for 2020/21. The majority of complaints were concluded at Stage One. This demonstrates a positive commitment to resolving matters at the earliest stage of the process possible.

Thank you for your encouraging support. We value complaints and the information they provide to help us improve the way we do things. Please continue to give us your feedback on any aspect of the Council's services, all of which have contributed to the production of this Annual Complaints Monitoring Report.

Lorna Meahan

Director Economy and Resources



Summary

Since April 2013, all Scottish Local Authorities have been required to monitor and report their performance on handling complaints under their Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) against a suite of high-level performance indicators to meet Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) statutory requirements. This report provides information on customer complaints and our performance between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, together with comparisons on how we are performing against our previous reports of 2019/20 and 2018/19.

During 2020/21 the Council upgraded the system used for recording Comments, Compliments and Complaints, to the latest version, Respond 8, which went live on 1 October 2020.

In 2020/21 we received 281 new complaints. This is a substantial reduction and improvement on the 2019/20 figure of 456 and a significant decrease of 38.37% (175 complaints).

In Quarter 1 we saw a marked reduction in the volume of complaints received by the Council, with only 41 complaints received. Quarter 2 remained similarly low at 56. This can likely be attributed to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption to public services due to national lockdown.

As lockdown restrictions started to ease, we began to see a return to normal levels of complaints. In Quarter 3 2020/21 there were 83, against 117 in 2019/20 and in Quarter 4 2020/21 there were 101 against 104 in 2019/20.



Complaints received in 2020/21 by Service

Service	Number	%
Communities	127	45%
Economy and Resources	52	19%
Education and Learning	34	12%
Social Work	68	24%

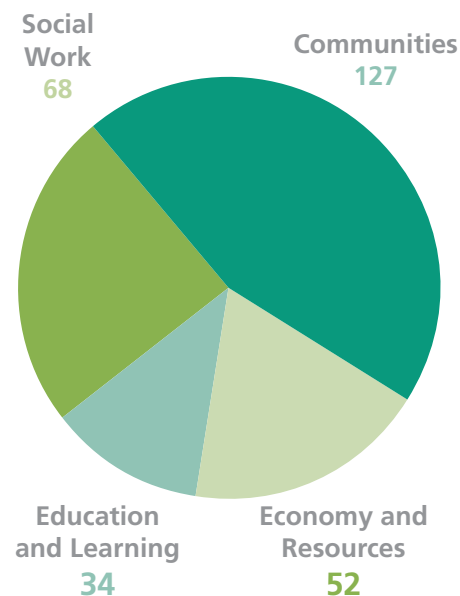
In 2020/21 we addressed and closed 77.7% (160) complaints at Stage One (Frontline Resolution). This means that the majority of complaints were concluded at Stage One. This demonstrates a positive commitment to resolving matters at the earliest stage of the process possible.

Although we have seen an increase in complaints escalating to Stage 2, 50% of these were Not Upheld, compared to 43% and 28% in the previous two years.

Unfortunately, we have seen a drop in performance in average times to respond to complaints, and percentage of complaints closed within the set timescales, when compared to last year. Factors which have affected this drop in performance include an increase in customers raising more complex complaints that required additional time to investigate as well as the availability of people to respond due to staff being redeployed to support the Council's Covid-19 response.

Complaint figures are regularly reported to the Council's Information Management Group for their consideration.

Complaints received in 2020/21 by Service



Definitions:

Stage One – complaints received and closed at Stage One (Frontline Resolution)

Stage Two (direct) – complaints that by-passed Stage One and went directly to Stage Two (Investigation). This could be complex complaints, complaints that relate to serious, high-risk or high profile issues or the customer refuses to engage at Stage One (Frontline Resolution).

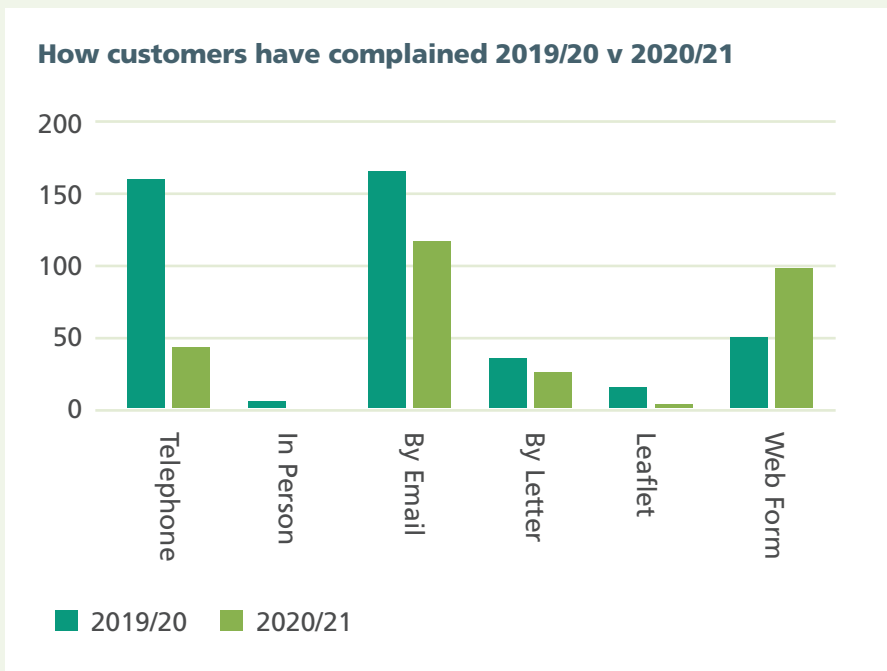
Stage Two Escalated – complaints which were dealt with initially at Stage One and were subsequently escalated to Stage Two (Investigation). This is usually because the customer is dissatisfied with their Stage one response.

How customers have complained

Customers can complain to the Council, in a range of ways, including

- **By email**
- **Online via our Complaints Webform**
- **By phone**
- **By Letter**
- **By complaints leaflet**
- **In person**

In 2020/21 we received 281 complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with their complaint. Of these complaints, 75% of customers contacted us electronically, either via email or through our complaints webform.



Breakdown of the way people got in touch 2020/21



41%
By Email



34%
Web Form



15%
Telephone



9%
By Letter



1%
Leaflet

Our Performance – Key Figures

The following sections provide performance information against the indicators outlined by the SPSO.

Indicator 1 Complaints Received Per 1,000 of the Population

This indicator details the total number of complaints handled by Dumfries and Galloway Council in the reporting period 2020/21

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number of complaints received per 1,000	1.9	3.1	2.3
Total number of complaints received	281	456	349

Indicator 2 Closed Complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two as a percentage of all complaints closed.

The term “closed” refers to a complaint that has been responded to and at the time no further action is required.

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number complaints closed at Stage One as % of all complaints	77.7% (160)	90% (312)	83% (261)
Number complaints closed at Stage Two as % of all complaints	12.6% (26)	4% (14)	8% (25)
Number complaints closed at Stage Two after escalation as % of all complaints	9.7% (20)	6% (20)	9% (29)



281

new complaints in
2020 - 2021



77.7%

of complaints
were closed at
Stage One



Indicator 3 Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld

When responding to customers complaints we explain whether their complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld and explain why.

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints which were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed (responded to) in full at each stage.

Upheld

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number of complaints upheld at Stage One as % of all complaints closed at Stage One	58.1% (93 of 160)	56% (176 of 312)	42% (111 of 261)
Number complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	15.4% (4 of 26)	21% (3 of 14)	24% (6 of 25)
Number escalated complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	25% (5 of 20)	25% (5 of 20)	24% (7 of 29)

Partially Upheld

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number of complaints partially upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	11.9% (19 of 160)	19% (59 of 312)	21% (54 of 261)
Number complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	34.6% (9 of 26)	36% (5 of 14)	48% (12 of 25)
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	35% (7 of 20)	45% (9 of 20)	38% (11 of 29)

Not Upheld

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number complaints not upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	30% (48 of 160)	25% (77 of 312)	37% (96 of 261)
Number complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	50% (13 of 26)	43% (6 of 14)	28% (7 of 25)
Number escalated complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	40% (8 of 20)	30% (6 of 20)	38% (11 of 29)

Definition of the outcomes:

UPHELD

Means the service did not reach the standard that is expected. (Something has gone wrong)

PARTIALLY UPHELD

This would be used where the organisation found that there was evidence of service failure in one or more elements of the complaint, even if other parts of the complaint were not upheld

NOT UPHELD

Means that the service provided was of a standard that is expected.

Indicator 4 Average Times

This indicator details the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage One (target – 5 working days)	6 w/ds	4 w/ds	7 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage Two (target – 20 working days)	38 w/ds	26 w/ds	14 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (target – 20 working days)	32 w/ds	30 w/ds	25 w/ds

Indicator 5 Performance against Timescales

This indicator reports number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed (responded to) in full within the set timescales of 5 working days for Stage 1 and 20 working days for Stage 2

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Number complaints closed at Stage One within 5 working days as % of Stage One complaints (target – 80%)	69.4% (111 of 160)	71% (221 of 312)	66% (173 of 261)
Number complaints closed at Stage Two within 20 working days as % of Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)	30.8% (8 of 26)	29% (4 of 14)	36% (9 of 25)
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)	40% (8 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)

Unfortunately, we have seen a drop in performance in average times to respond to complaints, and percentage of complaints closed within the set timescales, when compared to last year. Factors which have affected this drop in performance include an increase in customers raising more complex complaints that required additional time to investigate as well as the availability of people to respond due to staff being redeployed to support the Council's Covid-19 response.

This is something that we are working hard to improve for the year ahead as we start to recover from the pandemic. A weekly report is provided to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Communities Committee on complaints performance. Where responses are issued out with the set timescales, Services are asked to provide the Information Governance Team with a reason for the delay and any improvement actions to be taken.

6 working days

JANUARY

SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	X	X	X	X	X
13	14	X	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage One (target – 5 working days)

40%

JANUARY

SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
		1	2	X	X	X
6	7	X	X	X	X	X
13	14	X	X	X	X	X
20	21	X	X	X	X	X
27	28	X	X	31		

Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)

Indicator 6 Number of Cases where an Extension is authorised

We always aim to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. However, there are times when a complaint is particularly complex and it is not possible to fully investigate the issues within the prescribed timescales. In these situations, we can agree with a complainant to extend the timescales for closing the complaint. This indicator outlines the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline has been authorised

Description	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
% of complaints at Stage One where extension was authorised	9.4% (15 of 160)	2% (5 of 312)	8% (20 of 261)
% of complaints at Stage Two where extension was authorised	69.2% (18 of 26)	57% (8 of 14)	48% (12 of 25)
% of escalated complaints where extension was authorised	55% (11 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)	10% (3 of 29)

We have seen an increase in the number of extensions being applied to complaints at each stage of the process. This is again due to the complexity of complaints raised requiring careful consideration and detailed investigation as well as staff availability during the Covid-19 response. By applying an extension this means that we are keeping customers up-to-date about the reason for the extension and when they can expect a response.



Indicator 7 Customer Satisfaction

In recognition that we were not receiving meaningful information from the survey that was previously in place, we developed a revised survey. The survey is based on the template being developed by the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN) working alongside the SPSO. This will enable better benchmarking of complaint handling satisfaction across Scottish Local Authorities.

From 1 October 2020 a new electronic customer satisfaction survey was introduced using Microsoft Forms. A link to this survey is sent out to all customers with their response. From 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021 we received 4 responses to the Complaints Customer Satisfaction Survey. Results received relies on the good will of customers taking the time to complete the survey.

Survey Questions	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4
Information about the complaints procedure was easy to access	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
I found it easy to make my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
I was given the opportunity to fully explain my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Staff understood my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Staff asked what I wanted to happen as a result of my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Agree
I received a response to my complaint within the set timescales	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree
I was kept informed of any delays to receiving the response to my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree
The response to my complaint was easy to understand	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly agree
Overall I was satisfied with the handling of my complaint	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree

We will continue to encourage customers to complete this survey so that informative data can be gathered about whether or not customers are satisfied with the way that their complaint has been handled. This will also enable informed decisions to be made about any improvements to the procedure that might be required.



Indicator 8 Learning from Complaints

We should embrace all the feedback we receive to gain a better understanding of our customers reasons for complaining then engage with our staff on ways to improve. One of the most important aspects of the Complaints Handling Procedure is to learn from the feedback we receive from our customers.

The examples below demonstrate service improvements and/or changes that have been made to Council services as a result of our learning from the key themes of complaints.

Improvement work undertaken

Education and Learning Directorate

As learning from complaints data is gathered, this helps inform guidance and policy development for schools and central colleagues as a direct response to parental comments, complaints, and compliments. Complaints are managed by a team in the Curriculum and Quality Improvement Team which reports to Head of Education (Learning & Resources) and Head of Education (Quality and Curriculum).

As part of our Learning from Complaints process we have now provided a personal contact point to allow parents to discuss issues pre-complaint, and have created an additional email to enhance engagement with parents:

EducationandLearningParentalInvolvement@dumgal.gov.uk

The Directorate continues to develop dedicated reporting and recording for Stage 2 complaint recommendations. The department reviews each case where recommendations have been made to refine timeframes to support customer satisfaction.

For example, in session 20/21 as a consequence of parental complaints the following amendments and changes to practice, guidance and / or policy have been made:

- Admissions Policy 2019 amendment to deferred entry information reflecting parental rights
- Staff training and increased profile of special dietary requirement for pupils to address food allergy safety for all children and young people including those who do not have school lunches
- Authority and School Handbooks have been updated to incorporate information on how class organisation is managed in our schools where composite classes are a feature
- Updated schools' guidance on Elected Member consent in relation to disclosure of Special Category Personal Data for pupils in line with GDPR
- Information sharing and support through DGC public facing webpages that include Home Education, Supporting Learners and information on our Educational Psychologist provision in order to support parental involvement, engagement and understanding of this Service. <https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/22434/Educational-Psychology-Service>



Social Work Directorate

A complaint received in Adult Services resulted in new guidance being issued to staff to offer a consistent approach when working with adults accessing respite provision, where transport needs require to be given further consideration.

Social Work Services have worked with our colleagues in the Health and Social Care Partnership to improve multi-agency discharge planning where an individual's needs are more complex.

As a result of a complaint, development sessions have been held between staff in the Mental Health Team and colleagues in localities. These sessions provided an opportunity for staff to raise their awareness and understanding of issues around the legislation for people with incapacity, including Power of Attorney and Guardianship.

From recommendations made by the SPSO following their investigation of a complaint about Children and Families' Services, a programme of work was undertaken to review and update the Kinship Care Policy and Procedure. All locality staff were supported to understand and implement the required changes to policy and working practices via team meetings and development days and communications from senior managers.

Communities Directorate

After receiving complaints across the Directorate regarding the professionalism and conduct of staff members, staff were reminded of the importance of good customer service and provided a refresher on the Council's Code of Conduct.

A few Stage 2 complaints received by the Directorate were complex, high risk or sensitive. Some of these resulted in changes to processes. These changes are currently being implemented as part of our learning from complaints.

Economy and Resources Directorate

As a result of a complaint, a more robust communication protocol has been put in place between staff members to ensure that matters requiring attention are not lost. Improvements in lease conditions were also made to ensure that the Council can manage tenants in rented property.

As a result of a complaint about incorrect information being provided which led to a delay in the reporting process, further staff training and awareness of roads authorities and responsibilities was conducted to prevent this from happening again.

Following a complaint about the lack of consistency in customer service provided to a customer by the Contact Centre after two phone calls on the same subject matter, further staff training was provided on the use of the customer relationship management (CRM) system.



Projected figures for 2021/22

Looking ahead at projections for the 2021/22 Annual Complaints Monitoring Report, the below table shows a comparison of how many complaints were received in Quarter 1 (April/May/June) of 2020/21 compared to 2021/22. It is important to note that Quarter 1 of 2020/21 saw a clear drop off in complaints received due to the introduction of national lockdown measures as a response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Year	2020/21	2021/22
April	11	32
May	13	29
June	17	58
Quarter 1 Total	41	119

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The SPSO publish findings to share learning from complaints and inform improvements.

When they investigate a complaint, they usually report their findings and conclusion in a decision letter. These findings are also published online as Decision Reports. In some cases, they lay the full report of investigation before the Scottish Parliament and publish it online as an investigation report.

The decisions are published on their website at www.spsso.org.uk/our-findings

This information enables us to use learning from the outcomes of SPSOs findings and allows us to make service improvements.

Compliments

Compliments are expressions of praise, encouragement or gratitude about services provided or managed by the Council and present valuable feedback about the level of satisfaction with service delivery, highlighting:

- valuable indicators of the effectiveness of a service
- useful insights about the aspects of service most meaningful to customers
- examples of good practice which can be shared throughout the Council
- an opportunity to recognise the efforts of staff
- acknowledgements of excellence to boost morale.

Staff acknowledge compliments and thank customers for their feedback. Where possible, customers are informed how the feedback will be used and assured that it will be passed on to the relevant staff members.

The 95 recorded Compliments for the Council during 2020/21 are detailed as follows. This is an increase on the 2019/20 figure of 47. This is extremely positive as, not only did we record a reduction in complaints, but also an increase in compliments.

Compliments received in 2020/21 by Service

Service	Number	%
Communities	62	65.26%
Economy and Resources	14	14.73%
Social Work	13	13.70%
Education and Learning	6	6.31%

Although the Communities Directorate received the largest number of complaints, they also received the largest number of compliments.

One of the recurring themes of the compliments received in 2020/21 was the perennial plants within the flower bed at the roundabout on Glasgow Road next to The Bridge.



Here is what customers had to say about the flower bed:

“Congratulations to the team that came up with the idea and planting scheme for the roundabout... the informal insect attracting plants are attractive as well as beneficial. It would be lovely to see this repeated on as many areas as possible.”

“The roundabout looks so much nicer with the range of flowers and plants this year. Far prettier and more sustainable than the usual display of bright annuals which are not insect friendly.”

“Its design and planting are a welcome change to the previous formal planting themes usually adopted by councils. It gives me pleasure every time I pass it so thank you keep up the good work it is appreciated.”

“Can you pass on my compliments to the department responsible for the planting scheme on the roundabout. It is a very natural looking scheme with a lovely variety of plants.”

“I wish to say that the planting on the roundabout is a credit to your gardeners. The choice of colour and plants is amazing for the time of year.”

“I write to say how beautiful the plants are on the roundabout. It is a joy to behold. Many thanks to all concerned.”

Conclusion

Overall, there has been a decrease in the volume of complaints received by the Council in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20. This can likely be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption to public services due to national lockdown. We continue to close the majority of complaints at Stage One which demonstrates a positive commitment to resolving matters at the earliest stage of the process possible.

Unfortunately, we have seen a drop in performance in average times to respond to complaints, and percentage of complaints closed within the set timescales, when compared to the previous year. This is something that we are working hard to improve for the year ahead as we start to recover from the pandemic.

Despite a backdrop of the global pandemic, this year has also seen a few significant changes and improvements to our complaints handling processes.

We upgraded our complaints management system. This major upgrade involved a significant change in our way of working. The new system went live on 1 October 2020. The system is being used to log and process comments, compliments and complaints and our new web form is proving a popular way for customers to contact us.

The Council was also required to fully implement the SPSOs revised Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) by 1 April 2021. The new MCHP includes a core text which is consistent across all public services in Scotland, with some additional guidance and examples specific to each sector. The previously separate MCHPs for Local Authorities and Social Work Services were merged into a single MCHP.

The Council remains committed to listening to our customers and using customer feedback to actively change and improve the way we do things. We continue to be represented on the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN) to ensure best practice.

We use the above performance framework from the SPSO to assess how our organisation manages complaints, how accessible our complaints procedure is and the effectiveness of our governance and monitoring arrangements. We continue to review and challenge our processes to deliver quality services.

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about our complaint's procedure or about our annual report, please contact us.

Phone: 030 33 33 3000

Email: commentsandcomplaints@dumgal.gov.uk

Online: www.dumgal.gov.uk/complaints

Write to: Dumfries and Galloway Council, Information Governance Team, Council HQ, English Street, Dumfries, DG1 2DD