

Annual Complaints Monitoring Report



2022/23



Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
How customers have complained	5
Complaints received by topic	6
Complaints received by type	6
Our Performance – Key Figures	7
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)	16
Projected figures for 2023/24	18
Compliments	18
Conclusion	21
Contact Us	22



Foreword

I am pleased to present Dumfries and Galloway Council's Annual Complaints Monitoring Report for 2022/2023.

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 key performance indicators set out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), which we have been required to report on since the introduction of the national Model 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 an indication of the number of compliments recorded across the Council during 2022/23. I am grateful to all those who have taken the time to contact us to acknowledge the effort made by staff.

Thank you for your encouraging support. We value all feedback we receive from our customers as this helps us to 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.

Dawn Roberts
Chief Executive



Introduction

The Council adopted the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) Model Complaint Handling Procedure (MCHP) with effect from 1 April 2013. Integral to the MCHP is the requirement that all Scottish Local Authorities monitor complaints against a range of set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are used by all 32 local authorities and the publication of an annual report.

In March 2022, the SPSO published revised KPI guidance which applies to all Local Authorities. The revised set of standardised complaints KPIs are applicable for data collected from 1 April 2022.

Within the revised guidance there are four mandatory quantitative KPIs:

- Indicator One: the total number of complaints received
- Indicator Two: the number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days
- Indicator Three: the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage
- Indicator Four: the outcome of complaints at each stage

It is a minimum requirement for all organisations to report against these mandatory KPIs in their annual complaint's performance report. The MCHP also features qualitative measures, which include a statement about learning from complaints; raising awareness among vulnerable groups; staff training and customer satisfaction, however, these are not mandatory. The deadline for publishing annual complaints reports is the end of October each year. The report reflects the revised KPI guidance.

This report provides information on customer complaints and our performance between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, together with comparisons on how we are performing against our previous reports of 2021/22, 2020/21, 2019/20 and 2018/19.

In 2022/23 we received 581 new complaints. This is an increase on the 2021/22 figure of 534 new complaints. Last year, when looking ahead at projections for 2022/23, we could see by the end of Quarter 1 of 2022/23 that there was already an increase in complaints to the previous year. This could be partly attributed to better awareness of the Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) both internally and externally due to the programme of awareness raising which was put in place to support the implementation of the revised CHP in April 2021.



Our aim is to 'get it right first time' with quick, simple, and streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by capable, well-trained staff. In 2022/23 we addressed and closed 85.7% (457 of 533) of complaints at Stage One (Frontline Response). This means that the majority of complaints were concluded at Stage One. This demonstrates a continued positive commitment to resolving matters at the earliest stage of the process.

Complaint figures are reported quarterly to the Council's Information Management Group and annually to the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee. All members of the public can access the Quarterly and Annual Complaints Monitoring Reports as they are published online on our website: <https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/complaintsprocedure>

Directorates include complaints performance in their Business Plan which are then reported to their Service committee every 6 months and annually. In addition, individual Directorates also undertake additional reporting; for example Education and Learning Directorate provide weekly reports to the Heads of Service on any pending complaints and also share pre-complaint concerns raised by parents or staff.

How customers have complained

Customers can complain to the Council in a range of ways, including email, online via our complaints webform, by phone, letter or in person.

In 2022/23 we received 581 complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with their complaint. We continue to see customers opting to contact us electronically, with most complaints received via our online complaints webform or by email.

Both the categories below are where complaints are received over the telephone, however, this has been broken down by the following categories for reporting purposes.

- **Telephone** – this is when the customer has telephoned the Service or the Information Governance Team (IGT) direct to make a complaint.
- **Via the contact centre** – this is when the customer has telephoned the Contact Centre to make a complaint. The contact centre will either direct the call through to the IGT or complete the complaint form online on behalf of the customer.

Although there are low numbers for complaints received in person, there are examples of good practice. Within the Waste Collection Service staff who are customer facing issue a Waste Collection Service calling card. This directs the customers to Waste Services to discuss an issue or, when they have expressed a dissatisfaction with the Council, to the complaints handling procedure.

How Customers Complained in 2022/23



41%
Web Form



27%
By Email



20%
Telephone



7%
Via the Contact Centre



5%
By Letter



0%
In Person
(1)

Complaints received by topic

We have developed a list of 'topics' which complaint handlers are prompted to select from when recording the details of a complaint. This classification allows us to run reports about a specific topic area and identify themes of complaints received and identify any trends.

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the most common customer complaints related to the following topic areas across all Services. Please note that the topic captured relies on the professional judgement of the complaint handler managing the case.

Topic	Number of complaints	Percentage of the total complaints received
Professionalism of Staff	55	9%
Behaviour/Bullying (Schools)	40	7%
Inadequate or poor standard of service delivery	32	6%
Communication	30	5%
Other	28	5%
Council Tax	26	4%
Potholes	26	4%
Waste Collection	24	4%
Planning	20	3%
Road Condition/Road Maintenance	20	3%
Additional Support Needs	19	3%
Drains	15	3%
Learning and Teaching	13	2%

Complaints received by type

When recording the details of a complaint, complaint handlers are prompted to select from a list of complaint 'type'. This classification is based on what the complaint refers to from 'What is a complaint?' set out in the MCHP. This classification allows us to run reports about a specific area and identify themes of complaints received and identify any trends.

Type	Number of complaints
Inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service	207
Conduct, treatment by or attitude of member of staff or contractor	101
Dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual	77
Failure or refusal to provide a service	61
Failure to respond to correspondence/telephone call	46
Disagreement with a decision	34
Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services	26
Accuracy of information	11
Lack of information	9
Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process	8
Other	1

Our Performance – Key Figures

The following sections detail our performance against the set of standardised complaints KPIs outlined by the SPSO. The KPIs outlined below, apply to all Local Authorities that have a statutory duty to comply with the SPSO's MCHP.

Definitions:

Dumfries and Galloway Council's definition of a complaint is, 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our Council action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of our Council.'

Stages:

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

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 Response).

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.

Outcomes:

Resolved – A complaint is resolved when both the organisation and the customer agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld

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 One: the total number of complaints received.

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by Dumfries and Galloway Council in the reporting period. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 (this includes escalated complaints, as they were first received at Stage 1), and the number of complaints received directly at Stage 2.

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 *	2022/23
Total number of complaints received	349	456	281	534	582
The total number of complaints received per 1,000 population	2.3	3.1	1.9	3.6	3.9

**The low figures for 2020/21 were attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption to public services due to national lockdown. As lockdown restrictions eased, we saw a return to normal levels of complaints.*

Complaints received in 2022/23 by Directorate

Service	Number	%
Communities	333	57%
Education and Learning	138	24%
Economy and Resources	56	10%
Social Work	54	9%

Please note: complaints received includes complaints that may have been later withdrawn by the customer or determined out of remit.

Indicator Two: the number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days

The CHP requires complaints to be closed within five working days at stage 1 and 20 working days at stage 2. The term "closed" refers to a complaint that has had a response sent to the customer and at the time no further action is required (regardless at which stage it is processed and whether any further escalation takes place).

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number complaints closed at Stage One within 5 working days as % of Stage One complaints (target – 80%)	66% (173 of 261)	71% (221 of 312)	69.4% (111 of 160)	86% (338 of 393)	88.0% (402 of 457)
Number complaints closed at Stage Two within 20 working days as % of Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)	36% (9 of 25)	29% (4 of 14)	30.8% (8 of 26)	43.5% (10 of 23)	36.4% (8 of 22)
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)	45.9% (17 of 37)	53.7% (29 of 54)

Indicator Three: the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

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

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage One (target – 5 working days)	7 w/ds	4 w/ds	6 w/ds	4.7 w/ds	4.7 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage Two (target – 20 working days)	14 w/ds	26 w/ds	38 w/ds	35.1 w/ds	37.1 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (target – 20 working days)	25 w/ds	30 w/ds	32 w/ds	30.2 w/ds	33.6 w/ds

The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline was applied

There are times when an extension to the timescales may be necessary. Extensions must be agreed with an appropriate manager. We must keep the customer updated on the reason for the delay and give them a revised timescale for completion. This indicator outlines the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the 5 or 20 working day timeline was applied.

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number and percentage of complaints at Stage One where extension was authorised	8% (20 of 261)	2% (5 of 312)	9.4% (15 of 160)	7.6% (30 of 393)	6.6% (30 of 457)
Number and percentage of complaints at Stage Two where extension was authorised	48% (12 of 25)	57% (8 of 14)	69.2% (18 of 26)	69.6% (16 of 23)	63.6% (14 of 22)
Number and percentage of escalated complaints where extension was authorised	10% (3 of 29)	40% (8 of 20)	55% (11 of 20)	43.2% (16 of 37)	33.3% (18 of 54)

The number of extensions being applied to complaints at Stage One of the complaints process remains low. Although the percentage has dropped this year, we continue to see a high number of Stage Two complaints having an authorised extension applied. Extensions are often required due to the complexity of complaints raised needing careful consideration and detailed investigation, as well as the availability of staff conducting investigations due to resources and competing priorities. 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.

The SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles states that:

“Thoroughness of investigation should not be compromised by attempts to meet timescales and flexibility may be afforded for particularly complex cases. It is vital that, in cases where timescales cannot be met for good reason, complainants are kept informed of those reasons.”

(<https://www.spsso.org.uk/sites/spsso/files/csa/principles.pdf>)

The below table provides a breakdown of the reasons why 32 Stage Two complaints had an extension applied. A number of these were extended due to the Investigating Officers being unable to obtain essential information to support their investigation within normal timescales. This can be because staff or customers are not available to provide information which is crucial to establishing the circumstances of the case.

Reason for extension	Number of cases
Unable to obtain essential information within timescale	10
School holidays	5
Complexity of issue(s)	5
Meeting with customer	4
Lack of response from customer	3
Essential information unavailable due to long-term sickness, leave or professional hearings	3
Alternative resolution action in progress as agreed with customer	2

A new process for authorising an extension to a Stage Two complaint was introduced for 2022/23. Staff have been reminded that extensions should not be made unless there is an exceptional circumstance. An extension must be authorised by a Responsible Manager (Head of Service or Director).

Indicator Four: the outcome of complaints at each stage

There is a requirement for the outcome to be recorded for each complaint. There are four outcome categories: resolved, upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. Where some of the points of complaint are upheld and others are not, this should be reported as 'partially upheld'. If a customer complains about two or more completely distinct topics, these should be treated as two or more complaints. This indicator provides information on the number of complaints which were resolved, upheld, partially upheld or not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed (*responded to*) in full at each stage.

Resolved

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints resolved at Stage One as % of all complaints closed at Stage One	N/A	N/A	N/A	31% (122 of 393)	28% (128 of 457)
Number complaints resolved at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	N/A	N/A	N/A	0% (0 of 23)	4.5% (1 of 22)
Number escalated complaints resolved at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.4% (2 of 37)	9.3% (5 of 54)

Upheld

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints upheld at Stage One as % of all complaints closed at Stage One	42% (111 of 261)	56% (176 of 312)	58.1% (93 of 160)	36.6% (144 of 393)	29.5% (135 of 457)
Number complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	24% (6 of 25)	21% (3 of 14)	15.4% (4 of 26)	21.7% (5 of 23)	13.6% (3 of 22)
Number escalated complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	24% (7 of 29)	25% (5 of 20)	25% (5 of 20)	13.5% (5 of 37)	14.8% (8 of 54)

Partially Upheld

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of complaints partially upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	21% (54 of 261)	19% (59 of 312)	11.9% (19 of 160)	10.9% (43 of 393)	17.1% (78 of 457)
Number complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	48% (12 of 25)	36% (5 of 14)	34.6% (9 of 26)	26.1% (6 of 23)	36.4% (8 of 22)
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	38% (11 of 29)	45% (9 of 20)	35% (7 of 20)	43.2% (16 of 37)	40.7% (22 of 54)

Not Upheld

Description	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number complaints not upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	37% (96 of 261)	25% (77 of 312)	30% (48 of 160)	21.4% (84 of 393)	25.4% (116 of 457)
Number complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	28% (7 of 25)	43% (6 of 14)	50% (13 of 26)	52.2% (12 of 23)	45.5% (10 of 22)
Number escalated complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	38% (11 of 29)	30% (6 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)	37.8% (14 of 37)	35.2% (19 of 54)

A complaint is resolved when both the Council and the customer agree what action, if any, will be taken to provide a full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision on whether to uphold / not uphold. A complaint can be resolved at any stage of the process and resolving complaints early creates better customer relations. As you can see from the figures above, we have resolved 28% of complaints at Stage 1 (128 of 457). This shows a positive commitment to trying to respond to customers concerns as close to the point of service delivery as possible allowing us to deal with them locally and quickly.

Customer Satisfaction

Our Complaints Customer Satisfaction Survey is based on the template developed by the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN) working alongside the SPSO.

The satisfaction survey is an electronic customer satisfaction survey which uses Microsoft Forms to collect responses. A link to this survey is sent out to all customers with their complaint response both at Stage One and Stage Two of the process.

Between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, we received 10 responses to our Complaints Customer Satisfaction Survey. Results received relies on the good will of customers taking the time to complete the survey. All responses are anonymous.

We continue to encourage customers to complete this survey so that informative data can be gathered about whether 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 complaints handling procedure that might be required.

Survey Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
Information about the complaints procedure was easily accessible	1	4	0	0	5	0
I found it easy to make my complaint	3	3	1	0	3	0
I was happy that staff fully understood my complaint	2	3	0	0	5	0
I was given the opportunity to fully explain my complaint	2	5	1	1	1	0
Staff asked what I wanted to happen as a result of my complaint	2	2	2	1	3	0
The response to my complaint was easy to understand	2	2	1	3	2	0
Overall I was satisfied with the handling of my complaint	3	1	1	1	4	0
I was kept informed of any delays to receiving the response to my complaint	3	5	0	1	1	0

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

Communities (Quarter 1)

As a result of a Stage 2 complaint, a number of recommendations were made for Benefits and Revenues staff; refresher training in the application of GDPR for staff; updating the procedure note to reflect the need to consider GDPR and Senior Manager/Officer to agree and approve details pertaining the use of the Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA) Employer reply form prior to any communication with an employer.

Communities (Quarter 1)

As a result of a Stage 1 complaint the Council's website has been updated to ensure that telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are more visible enabling members of the public to source contact details without the necessity of scrolling through numerous documents to find them.

Communities (Quarter 2)

As a result of a Stage 2 Complaint the Roads Service reviewed the information provided for the stage 1 Complaint and will ensure that any future complaints are responded to in full with accurate information.

Communities (Quarter 2)

Following an investigation into a Stage 2 Complaint regarding a telephone complaint which was not traceable – the Investigating Officer recommended that a review of the current call handling arrangements, recording and routing was undertaken.

Economy and Resources (Quarter 3)

Our contact centre used all complaints received to inform a number of improvement actions. They put processes in place to monitor wait times and look at ways to better route and manage calls. They are looking at implementing 'call-backs' when call wait times are high – a piece of work is currently underway to scope this. They also changed the welcome message to improve the routing of calls. These improvement actions are relative to each of the complaints received.



Economy and Resources (Quarter 4)

This stage 2 complaint related to the failure of the Council to fully assess a site submitted by the owner of inclusion on the Council's Vacant and Derelict Land Register submission to the Scottish Government. As a result of this, the site has now been visited and assessed, and will be included at the next opportunity. A more robust process for site assessment and prioritisation has now been created, and workload has been shared more evenly across staff with relevant responsibilities.

Economy and Resources (Quarter 4)

This stage 2 complaint related to the Council's failure to respond more timeously to a report of a breach to planning permission. It was acknowledged by the staff member involved that they had failed to deal with the report as promptly as they would have liked, although it was also recognised that this had no impact on the outcome. A review of Development Management is currently underway in an effort to reduce staff workloads, which will allow more time to be spent dealing with matters of this nature.

Education and Learning (Quarter 1)

Data Protection: Schools should ensure that they review processes for the safe storage of sensitive and confidential documentation irrespective of the origins, to ensure that they comply with GDPR requirements. This includes handwritten notes or statements from children and young people in relation to incidents in schools whilst investigations are ongoing.

Education and Learning (Quarter 3)

In one-case, a young person was supported through resolution to a complaint by a change in their trusted person as identified by them, acknowledging the rights of the child. Another identified professional development through relevant support and training regarding parental rights. With regards to the secure record keeping of pupil statements this was highlighted as an area for improvement.

Checking whether there is a conflict of interest regarding complainant and employment by the council has been put in place by the Information Governance Team.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

Adult Services – It is important for staff to explain to individuals and families when information cannot be shared with them due to reasons of confidentiality rather than not return calls or respond to messages.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

Adult Services – Staff should ensure individuals are aware of timescales when renewing their Blue Badges. It is important that applicants understand that renewal badges are not issued until the month of expiry of the current badge.



Social Work (Quarter 2)

Adult Service complaint – It is important that staff keep families up to date with information about care provision that is out to tender, particularly in situations where there is an end date in place for an existing provider. Staff should be mindful of the need to explore alternative options with individuals and families in good time where it is identified that a new provider may not be found by a certain date.

Social Work (Quarter 3)

Adult Services – Staff should ensure good communication with individuals and families and remember to follow up on conversations where it has been agreed that regular updates or information will be provided.

Social Work (Quarter 3)

Children and Families – The process for making referrals to the Family Support Service has been reviewed and improvements made leading to a quicker and smoother process for staff.

Social Work (Quarter 3)

Children and Families – Senior Social Workers will ensure tighter checks and controls are in place to scrutinise documents and reports prior to Child's Planning meetings. Coupled with this improvement and learning action, development sessions have been held with staff to remind them of their role and responsibilities when handling and processing individuals and families' personal information.

Social Work (Quarter 4)

The Directorate gathered significant learning from a Stage 2 complaint in this quarterly period. The complaint was both very complex and sensitive and, although only one point was upheld, there were identified areas of practice where improvements could be made. A 7-minute briefing was developed to share learning with Social Work staff, and this was circulated to all managers with a request that the document be discussed with staff and at team meetings. This briefing highlights learning which is applicable to all staff across the Service and covers areas such as case note recording, information sharing and records management.



Staff training on Complaints

The emphasis in our Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) is on quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by empowered and well-trained staff. Training that has been provided to staff to help drive improvements in performance is detailed below.

Staff training provided

Stage 2 - SPSO Complaints Investigation Skills training course - Within this reporting period we have worked with Services to update our list of Investigating Officers (IO) for the complaints process. Working with the Information Governance Team, Services have nominated new staff to attend the new SPSO Online Complaints Investigation Skills course or identified existing IOs to undertake refresher training. This course is aimed at staff who investigate complaints at Stage 2 of the CHP. We have now broadened the pool of staff who can undertake investigations which means this workload can be shared across Services so that there is more staff who have the ability, as well as the right skill set, to undertake such investigations when required. In this reporting period 30 Officers have completed this online training.

Stage 1 - SPSO Good Complaints Handling training course – This course is aimed at staff handling complaints at Stage 1 of the Model Complaints Handling Procedure but would be useful for anyone involved in complaints handling looking to develop their knowledge. 12 complaint handlers/co-ordinators have completed this online accredited course within this reporting period.

Dumfries and Galloway Council in house Stage 1 Good Complaints Handling training – The Information Governance Team have developed an in-house Stage 1 Good Complaints Handling training course based on the SPSO Stage 1 training. This face-to-face course is aimed at staff who may be required to handle a complaint at Stage 1 of the CHP. Roads and Infrastructure staff were targeted initially and in this reporting period 46 Officers have completed this training.

Following on from this training, a guidance document has been developed to help staff appoint an Investigating Officer and Responsible Manager. This has been disseminated amongst staff for their use.

In addition, a briefing to clarify the role of Responsible Manager was developed to ensure that we fully maximise our learning from complaints. There is now a system in place to act on issues identified from complaints and to oversee the implementation of actions required.



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 Decision Reports 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.

In 2022/23 we received 581 complaints and 76 of those were handled at Stage Two (13% - 76/581).

The SPSO received 23 Stage Two cases relating to Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) from the 76 that DGC handled. The majority of the cases submitted to SPSO related to Education (5) followed by Environmental Health & Cleansing (4) and Roads & Transport (4). See Table 1.

Table 1

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Building Control			
Consumer Protection			
Economic Development			
Education	1	1	5
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1	2	4
Finance	2	3	
Fire & Police Boards			
Housing		2	1
HSCP - Social Work			
Land & Property			
Legal & Admin		2	
National Park Authorities			
Other			
Personnel			3
Planning	4	10	2
Recreation & Leisure			2
Roads & Transport			4
Social Work	4	5	2
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	2		
Valuation Joint Boards			
Welfare Fund - Crisis Grants			
TOTAL	14	25	23

In 2022/23 SPSO considered 21 of the 23 cases and only 1 was fully investigated with some upheld. In 2021/22 SPSO considered 12 of the 25 cases and only 5 were fully investigated with 3 being fully upheld. See Table 2.

Table 2

		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Advice	Enquiries			4
	Premature	2	3	3
	Unable to proceed	2	3	
	Total	4	6	7
Early Resolution	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))			
	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	2	1	5
	Discretion – alternative action proposed			
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available			
	Discretion - Good complaint handling	3	5	11
	Discretion – referred back		1	
	Discretion - Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome			
	Member of the public test not met (s 5 (6))			
	Organisation not in jurisdiction			1
	Premature			
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))			
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	1	0	1
	Time limit (s 10)			1
	Unable to proceed			1
Total	6	7	20	
Investigation	Fully upheld	1	3	
	Not upheld	1		
	Outcome not achievable		1	
	Resolved		1	
	Some upheld	2		1
	Total	4	5	1
TOTAL	14	18	28	

The SPSO assess each complaint to identify whether it should be prioritised for immediate consideration, or whether it can be resolved or handled quickly. Not all cases can be prioritised or addressed quickly, and these are held until they can be allocated. The SPSO figures in Table 1 and Table 2 differ because the SPSO do not look at everything they receive in the same year, so some cases roll over into the next year.

An explanation of the above terms used by the SPSO is available on their website at <https://www.sps.org.uk/explanation-terms>

The SPSO publish their Annual Statistic on their website at <https://www.sps.org.uk/statistics-2022-23>

Projected figures for 2023/24

Looking ahead at projections for the 2023/24 Annual Complaints Monitoring Report, the below table shows a comparison of how many complaints were received in Quarter 1 (April/May/June) of 2022/23 compared to Quarter 1 2023/24.

Year	2022/23	2023/24
April	33	48
May	50	63
June	51	64
Quarter 1 Total	134	175

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.

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total compliments received	47	95	141	144

During 2022/23 the Council recorded 144 compliments. This is extremely positive, and we continue to see a year-on-year increase in the number of compliments recorded.

Compliments received in 2022/23 by Directorate		
Service	Number	Percentage
Communities	94	65%
Social Work	34	24%
Economy and Resources	8	5.5%
Education and Learning	8	5.5%



How compliments were received 2022/23

Education and Learning note that the above figure does not accurately reflect the number of compliments received by the Directorate, as many of these are acknowledged and remain at school level. It should be noted that the majority of compliments are shared at the end of the academic year, therefore data for 2022/23 shows a small increase. Education colleagues have worked to encourage school staff to share the positive feedback they receive through our formal compliment reporting process so that these can be reflected within the figures and data for Quarter 1 2023/24 shows 40.

One of the recurring themes of the compliments received in 2022/23 was around Adult Social Work.

Here is just a few of the kind words customers had to say about our Adult Social Work Services:

"I'd like to thank you for all the support and guidance you have given... throughout the difficult times we have experienced..."

"We want to commend Single Access Point (S.A.P) as we have used this service and found the people speaking to very polite, helpful and knowledgeable."

"Today my husband has had a visit from Social Work Assistant from the Sensory Support Team. We want to comment her as she was very thorough, polite and helpful towards my husband."

"Thank you to member of staff for his help when setting up Telecare system and went above and beyond sorting out problems"

"Thanking xxx for help with support provided. Bath rail fitted next day and front door rail now in place. Very pleased with the service."

"I have had nothing but the best service from you all, whenever I've needed anything it's neem no bother whatsoever, physio, walking sticks, a crutch, shower seat! A was in shower which has made a huge difference. Its all so much easier."

"Please can my thanks be passed on to the Care Call team for the outstanding service my mother and I received... The call handler was so understanding and helpful and managed to set up a delivery within the hour by a really helpful technician. Many, many thanks to the team for outstanding service, a credit to D&G Council."

"The Customer wanted xxx manager to know how well she handled the call and how professional she was. The customer was very thankful to xxx as she was very pleasant, polite, and listened. The commode was delivered today, and it was less than 24 hours from ordering it and is very happy it came so quick."

"Please accept my gratitude for xxx support, time and patience today. I very much appreciate her friendly and informative manner and would be happy to offer further positive feedback..."



36%
By Email



33%
Web Form



15%
By Letter



6%
Telephone



5%
In Person



3%
Survey



1%
Via the
Contact
Centre



1%
By Social
Media

"Thanks for today. You did a really good job of communicating things to our mum, and to us!"

"The couple expressed their thanks and appreciation for the kindness, helpfulness, and patience during their call to the Social Work Access Team and ongoing referral process to the OT Team. The couple particularly wanted to highlight the service provided by OT Asst and Call Handler."

"I would like to pass on my thanks to xxx as I can't thank her enough for the care, I have received off her from being in hospital to her coming to my home. She has helped me so much... she really does go the extra mile for her clients. I couldn't have managed without her as I didn't know which way to turn. Thank you from the bottom of my heart the world would be a better place if everyone were like you. You are a special lady and I will never forget your kindness. Thank you."

"Thank you, phone call - The feedback received is that she is delighted with the service she received from Social Work Services. She requested grab rails last week and they have been fitted today."

"I found xxx to be genuinely interested and caring of my mum's wellbeing and committed to ensuring she was safe and properly cared for... We are very grateful to xxx for taking her job seriously; for her outstanding and proactive approach to my mum's care."

"... extremely impressed with the service she has received from xxx in Social Work and said that xxx always takes the time to listen and always responds to requests and emails. xxx takes concerns seriously and has often contacted her out with normal working hours when it has been agreed she will call her back."

"Customer wished to thank Adult Services especially the Access Team and Duty Team who made contact with her during the recent floods to make sure she was ok and had everything she needed. She thanked them for their care and concern..."

"Hi just wanting to feedback on a member of your team. Just wanted to say thanks again to xxx for helping us get this sorted and for doing her job so well."

"I am writing this email to give you feedback on a member of your team. I feel I wanted to take the time to message you about how impressed I am with xxx. He is a credit to your department and an example to up and coming social workers... he is an absolute star!"



Conclusion

This Annual Complaints Monitoring Report for the Council complies with the SPSO's requirement to publish complaints performance information and also reiterates the Council's commitment to valuing complaints.

The SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles states that an effective complaints handling procedure aims to resolve complaints to the customer's satisfaction wherever possible and appropriate. These are fundamental elements of good complaints handling. The revised MCHP, introduced on 1 April 2021, brings this focus on resolution to the forefront by providing a definition of 'resolving' a complaint. A complaint may be resolved at any point in the complaint handling process. We try to resolve complaints wherever possible, although we accept this is not always possible. In 2022/23 we have resolved 28% (128 of 457) of our Stage One complaints and 7.89% (6 of 76) of Stage Two complaints.

Overall, we have recorded an increase in the number of complaints received for 2022/23 when compared to the previous year. This could be partly attributed to better awareness of the CHP both internally and externally due to the programme of awareness raising which was put in place to support the implementation of the revised CHP. If complaint figures continue as they are from Quarter 1 2023, we will see a further increase for 2023/24.

The majority of complaints continue to be concluded at Stage One of the process which demonstrates the Council's positive commitment to resolving matters at the earliest stage of the process possible. The average working days to close a complaint at Stage 1 of the complaints process has stayed the same as the previous year and is below the set timescale of five working days. However, we have seen a drop in performance in average times to respond to complaints at Stage 2.

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

