

Annual Complaints Monitoring Report



2023/24



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Foreword

I am pleased to present Dumfries and Galloway Council's Annual Complaints Monitoring Report for 2023/2024.

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 2023/24. 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 2023 and 31 March 2024, together with comparisons on how we are performing against our previous reports of 2022/23, 2021/22, 2020/21, 2019/20.

In 2023/24 we received 631 new complaints. This is an increase on the 2022/23 figure of 581 new complaints. Last year, when looking ahead at projections for 2023/24, 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 CHP both internally and externally. Customers are more aware of their right to complain and more likely to raise it as a complaint.



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 2023/24 we addressed and closed 85.2% (496 of 582) 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 2023/24 we received 631 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 by email or via our online complaints webform.

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, direct to the Service 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 2023/24



38%
By Email



33%
Web Form



18%
Telephone



6%
Via the
Contact
Centre



4%
By Letter



1%
In Person



0%
SMS/TEXT

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 2023 and 31 March 2024, 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	61	10%
Inadequate or poor standard of service delivery	40	6%
Waste Collection	40	6%
Behaviour/Bullying (Schools)	33	5%
Road Condition/Road Maintenance	29	5%
Communication	20	3%
Council Tax	20	3%
Additional Support Needs	19	3%
Learning and Teaching	19	3%
Planning	14	2%
Policy and Procedure	13	2%
Potholes	13	2%
School Estate	13	2%
Road Works and Road Closures	12	2%
Drains	11	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	272
Dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual	99
Conduct, treatment by or attitude of member of staff or contractor	80
Failure or refusal to provide a service	41
Disagreement with a decision	41
Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services	31
Failure to reply to correspondence/telephone calls	25
Failure to respond to correspondence/telephone call	18
Lack of information	14
Accuracy of information	8
Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process	2

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	2019/20	2020/21*	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total number of complaints received	456	281	534	582	631
The total number of complaints received per 1,000 population	3.1	1.9	3.6	3.9	4.2

**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 2023/24 by Directorate		
Service	Number	%
Communities	344	54%
Education and Learning	158	25%
Social Work	75	12%
Economy and Resources	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	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number complaints closed at Stage One within 5 working days as % of Stage One complaints (target – 80%)	71% (221 of 312)	69.4% (111 of 160)	86% (338 of 393)	88.0% (402 of 457)	87.1% (432 of 496)
Number complaints closed at Stage Two within 20 working days as % of Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)	29% (4 of 14)	30.8% (8 of 26)	43.5% (10 of 23)	36.4% (8 of 22)	34.3% (12 of 35)
Number escalated complaints closed within 20 working days as % of escalated Stage Two complaints (target – 80%)	40% (8 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)	45.9% (17 of 37)	53.7% (29 of 54)	70.6% (36 of 51)

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	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage One (target – 5 working days)	4 w/ds	6 w/ds	4.7 w/ds	4.7 w/ds	4.9 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints at Stage Two (target – 20 working days)	26 w/ds	38 w/ds	35.1 w/ds	37.1 w/ds	32.9 w/ds
Average time in working days to respond to complaints after escalation (target – 20 working days)	30 w/ds	32 w/ds	30.2 w/ds	33.6 w/ds	24.1 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	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number and percentage of complaints at Stage One where extension was authorised	2% (5 of 312)	9.4% (15 of 160)	7.6% (30 of 393)	6.6% (30 of 457)	7.5% (37 of 496)
Number and percentage of complaints at Stage Two where extension was authorised	57% (8 of 14)	69.2% (18 of 26)	69.6% (16 of 23)	63.6% (14 of 22)	51.4% (18 of 35)
Number and percentage of escalated complaints where extension was authorised	40% (8 of 20)	55% (11 of 20)	43.2% (16 of 37)	33.3% (18 of 54)	21.6% (11 of 51)

The number of extensions being applied to complaints at Stage One of the complaints process remains low but has increased slightly since last year. 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 29 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
Essential information unavailable due to long-term sickness, leave or professional hearings	9
Unable to obtain essential information within timescale	5
Lack of response from customer	3
Meeting with customer	3
Complexity of issue(s)	2
Customer has requested an extension	2
Essential information unavailable due to long-term sickness, leave or professional hearings, Unable to obtain essential information within timescale	1
Meeting with customer, School holidays	1
Meeting with customer, Unable to obtain essential information within timescale	1
School holidays, Unable to obtain essential information within timescale, Complexity of issue(s)	1
Unable to obtain essential information within timescale, Essential information unavailable due to long-term sickness, leave or professional hearings	1

We have a process for authorising an extension to a Stage Two complaint. 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). We also have a procedure that should be followed when appointing an Investigation Officer to a Stage 2 Complaints. Stage 2 complaints should be investigated by someone who has received the appropriate training and has the time to undertake the investigation within the timeframe.

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	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of complaints resolved at Stage One as % of all complaints closed at Stage One	N/A	N/A	31% (122 of 393)	28% (128 of 457)	11.1% (55 of 496)
Number complaints resolved at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	N/A	N/A	0% (0 of 23)	4.5% (1 of 22)	2.9% (1 of 35)
Number escalated complaints resolved at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	N/A	N/A	5.4% (2 of 37)	9.3% (5 of 54)	7.8% (4 of 51)
Upheld					
Description	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of complaints upheld at Stage One as % of all complaints closed at Stage One	56% (176 of 312)	58.1% (93 of 160)	36.6% (144 of 393)	29.5% (135 of 457)	39.3% (195 of 496)
Number complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	21% (3 of 14)	15.4% (4 of 26)	21.7% (5 of 23)	13.6% (3 of 22)	34.3% (12 of 35)
Number escalated complaints upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	25% (5 of 20)	25% (5 of 20)	13.5% (5 of 37)	14.8% (8 of 54)	23.5% (12 of 51)
Partially Upheld					
Description	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of complaints partially upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	19% (59 of 312)	11.9% (19 of 160)	10.9% (43 of 393)	17.1% (78 of 457)	20.6% (102 of 496)
Number complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	36% (5 of 14)	34.6% (9 of 26)	26.1% (6 of 23)	36.4% (8 of 22)	25.7% (9 of 35)
Number escalated complaints partially upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	45% (9 of 20)	35% (7 of 20)	43.2% (16 of 37)	40.7% (22 of 54)	25.5% (13 of 51)
Not Upheld					
Description	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number complaints not upheld at Stage One as % of complaints closed at Stage One	25% (77 of 312)	30% (48 of 160)	21.4% (84 of 393)	25.4% (116 of 457)	29.0% (144 of 496)
Number complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of complaints closed at Stage Two	43% (6 of 14)	50% (13 of 26)	52.2% (12 of 23)	45.5% (10 of 22)	37.1% (13 of 35)
Number escalated complaints not upheld at Stage Two as % of escalated complaints closed at Stage Two	30% (6 of 20)	40% (8 of 20)	37.8% (14 of 37)	35.2% (19 of 54)	43.1% (22 of 51)

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 11.1% of complaints at Stage 1 (55 of 496). 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 2023 to 31 March 2024, we received 18 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		9	2	4	3	
I found it easy to make my complaint	2	4	5	3	4	
I was happy that staff fully understood my complaint	2	6	5	1	4	
I was given the opportunity to fully explain my complaint	2	9	1	3	3	
The points of my complaint were identified and responded to	2	10	2	1	3	
The response to my complaint was easy to understand	2	7	3	3	3	
Overall I was satisfied with the handling of my complaint	1	3	4	6	4	
I was clearly told what the next stage of the complaints process was for me	3	9	6			
I was told if the response was going to take longer than the set timescales (five working days at stage 1 and 20 working days at stage 2)	1	8	6			

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

Economy and Resources (Quarter 1)

After being notified of an incident that occurred within the dining space in a primary school, the catering service along with Education Services identified the potential risk of harm (scalding) to other children and have reduced the hazard by providing a service table to allow our children and young people to place their lunch trays on whilst uplifting additional food items and drinks prior to sitting.

Economy and Resources (Quarter 1)

As a result of learning from complaints, the Development Management service are reviewing their procedures in relation to assessing planning applications which is focused on updating agent/applicants more regularly on the progress of planning applications and reducing determination timescales.

Education and Learning (Quarter 1)

Stage 1 responses outlined a greater clarity on timelines for parents with regard to the approach to secondary school prior to any deadline for placing request forms in order to support transition planning for those children with additional support needs.

Schools have also undertaken to look for alternative solutions to timetables to support individual children with their engagement in education which reflect individual recommendations for children that we are unable to share.

Education and Learning (Quarter 1)

For an individual school it was recommended that staff training is implemented in Team Teach and that recording of incidents, including Pastoral Notes, is methodical and robust. Use of a resource/curricular programme for all learners such as Emotion Works, would be helpful for both staff and pupils to ensure staff feel confident in dealing with similar behavioural situations should they arise.

Where there has been a challenge to the professionalism of staff, where possible, the school and parents should endeavour to have face-to-face or telephone conversations so that any misinterpretations



from email/written communication can be discussed and clarified more timeously. This recommendation will be shared with all schools for session 2023-24 to increase resolution to complaints as part of our frontline school response.

Social Work (Quarter 1)

Following a complaint made to the Service regarding the use of Council pool vehicles, staff received refresher training and were also reminded of their responsibilities when driving Council vehicles.

Communities (Quarter 2)

Following on from a complaint received regarding customer service at the Robert Burns Centre – all staff members working at the centre have been trained and equipped to enable them to sell cinema tickets.

Communities (Quarter 2)

As a result of a complaint the process and procedures regarding the exiting of Council properties will be reviewed by Property Services. A documented handover process from Lead tenant to Property Services, with completion of building inspection, which will include confirmation that confidential waste arrangements are in place before exiting the building.

Communities (Quarter 2)

Following on from a complaint regarding inadequate signage at a recycling facility new signage has been purchased to be displayed at all sites across the region.

Communities (Quarter 2)

The investigation outcome of a complaint evidenced that the development of the Roads Service defect processes needs to improve customer feedback information.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

Following a complaint made to Adult Services, staff were reminded of the need for a timely response to emails and correspondence confirming arrangements made with external care providers.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

From a complaint made to the Care and Support Service (CASS), the following actions were taken:

- Reviewed the training for staff around identifying and reporting concerns;
- Reviewed internal procedures to ensure that appropriate action and assurances happen when concerns are flagged up;
- Direct work with staff to remind them to check that contact details for family members are up-to-date within our records.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

Resulting from a complaint made to Social Work Services, it was highlighted that improvements were needed around communication



between SWS and colleagues in Finance with regards to the sharing of decisions and arrangements for financial matters relating to individuals.

Social Work (Quarter 2)

Refresher training in handling complaints was arranged for staff following a complaint made to Social Work Services in relation to staff attitude and conduct.

Communities (Quarter 3)

Following on from a complaint received regarding officer professional conduct, the staff member has received customer care training to ensure that similar events do not occur in the future.

Communities (Quarter 3)

As a result of a complaint regarding road defects an investigation will be conducted into communications received and points of improvement and training will be provided where appropriate on completion of the investigation.

Communities (Quarter 3)

Following on from a complaint received regarding the handling of booking bulky uplifts all members of Contact Centre will receive additional training prior to the launch of the new booking service.

Communities (Quarter 3)

As a result of a complaint regarding maintenance and repairs procedure further training has been implemented for all staff to ensure a more in-depth understanding of the Housing Options and Homeless Services Procedure.

Please note on 1 April 2024 we moved to Lagan (Verint) as our new complaints management system so services were unable to provide any learning from complaints for Quarter 4.



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 better managed 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 32 Officers have completed this online training.

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 18 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 2023/24 we received 631 complaints and 86 of those were handled at Stage Two (13.63% - 86/631).

The SPSO received 28 Stage Two cases relating to Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) from the 86 that DGC handled. The majority of the cases submitted to SPSO related to Education (7) followed by Planning (6), Social Work (5) and Environmental Health & Cleansing (4) See Table 1.

Table 1

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Building Control				
Consumer Protection				
Economic Development				
Education	1	1	5	7
Environmental Health & Cleansing	1	2	4	4
Finance	2	3		
Fire & Police Boards				
Housing		2	1	1
HSCP - Social Work				
Land & Property				
Legal & Admin		2		1
National Park Authorities				
Other				
Personnel			3	
Planning	4	10	2	6
Recreation & Leisure			2	
Roads & Transport			4	3
Social Work	4	5	2	5
Subject unknown or Out of Jurisdiction	2			1
Valuation Joint Boards				
Welfare Fund - Crisis Grants				
TOTAL	14	25	23	28

In 2023/24 SPSO considered 21 of the 28 cases and only 2 were fully investigated with some upheld. In 2022/24 SPSO considered 21 of the 23 cases and only 1 was fully investigated with 1 being some upheld. See

Table 2

		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Advice	Enquiries			4	2
	Premature	2	3	3	6
	Unable to proceed	2	3		
	Total	4	6	7	8
Early Resolution	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))				1
	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	2	1	5	1
	Discretion – alternative action proposed				
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available				
	Discretion - Good complaint handling	3	5	11	13
	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	2
	Time limit (s 10)			1	1
	Unable to proceed			1	1
	Total	6	7	20	19
Investigation	Fully upheld	1	3		
	Not upheld	1			1
	Outcome not achievable		1		
	Resolved		1		
	Some upheld	2		1	1
	Total	4	5	1	2
TOTAL	14	18	28	29	

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.spsa.org.uk/explanation-terms>

The SPSO publish their Annual Statistic on their website at <https://www.spsa.org.uk/statistics-2023-24>

Projected figures for 2024/25

Looking ahead at projections for the 2024/25 Annual Complaints Monitoring Report, the below table shows a comparison of how many complaints were received in Quarter 1 (April/May/June) of 2023/24 compared to Quarter 1 2024/25.

Year	2023/24	2024/25
April	48	65
May	63	67
June	64	66
Quarter 1 Total	175	198

**Please note on 1 April 2024 we moved to Lagan (Verint) as our new complaints management system. The reporting functionality is not built into the system, and we are currently working with our third-party supplier and Business and Technology Solutions to develop the reports.*

The projected figures for 2024/25 are taken from the allocation emails that have been generated from our complaints management system so these figures may change when we run the reports.

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	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total compliments received	95	141	144	199

During 2023/24 the Council recorded 199 compliments. This is extremely positive, and we continue to see a year-on-year increase in the number of compliments recorded.



How compliments were received 2023/24

Compliments received in 2023/24 by Directorate		
Service	Number	Percentage
Communities	115	58%
Education and Learning	58	29%
Social Work	15	5.8%
Economy and Resources	11	5.5%

One of the recurring themes of the compliments received in 2023/24 was around Learning and Teaching.

Here is just a few of the kind words customers had to say about our schools and teachers:

"Thank you so much for your letter and for generously sharing your inspection findings... and I are delighted, though not surprised, to read the very positive outcome. It is a true reflection of the quality of your leadership and the hard work of the entire staff and we are so lucky to have such a primary school in our village community."

"...from the Learning Centre has been amazing. She actually took time to meet with us and listened. She goes out of her way to personalise support... and she is very approachable to us all. Thank you!"

"I just wanted to email to say thankyou so much for all your help and support this week. I was really worried about the exam today..., and all yours and... help made me so much less anxious. You and ... have also been great teachers this year too."

"Having spoken to friends with children at other schools I would like to acknowledge and thank the teachers who have offered after school classes and Easter School as many children have not had this offered to them elsewhere."

"Our children are very lucky to have such amazing Teachers and staff at our wee school."



55%
By Email



17%
Web Form



12%
By Letter



5%
Telephone



2%
In Person



5%
Survey



4%
Via the
Contact
Centre



0%
By Social
Media or
SMS/Text

"I would like to firstly express my gratitude to... for the teaching he has given to my daughter over the last year. He has engaged the class with a fun teaching style that all of the children have loved. As a parent he has always responded to my requests and concerns with professionalism and care. He is a very talented gentleman that is very natural at communicating with children, motivating and engaging them..."

"Thank you for everything you have done for... This is the reason we persevere with school to meet role models like you."

"I am writing to offer my warmest congratulations on your recent positive inspection. I note the range of strengths identified during the inspection and it is clear that your strong leadership has supported the school well in its improvement programme. It is very pleasing to hear about the positive relationships across the school Community.... This very good teamwork allows children attending small schools to work and play together, supporting them in the development of their knowledge and skills for learning, life and work..... Please share my congratulations and appreciation to your staff for their dedication and effort which is enabling your children to achieve success. I hope you and your team take time to reflect and enjoy your recent inspection success and I wish you well on your continued journey of improvement"

"...Thank you once again for supporting... You are a great role model for all the teachers."



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 2023/24 we have resolved 11.1% (55 of 496) of our Stage One complaints and 5.88% (5 of 86) of Stage Two complaints.

Overall, we have recorded an increase in the number of complaints received for 2023/24 when compared to the previous year. This could be partly attributed to better awareness of the CHP both internally and externally. Customers are more aware of their right to complain and more likely to raise it as a complaint. If complaint figures continue as they are from Quarter 1 2024, we will see a further increase for 2024/25.

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 increased slightly from the previous year and is below the set timescale of five working days. However, we have seen a slight improvement 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

