

Aberdeen City Council

Annual Complaints Performance Report 2022/23

Introduction

It is important that we understand your experience of dealing with Aberdeen City Council and we use the information we have received from complaints to help us improve our services.

By looking at the complaints received, we can try to prevent a problem happening again. The information recorded includes the types of complaint received, how quickly we dealt with each complaint and how many were upheld and not upheld. The information is split into the different complaint stages. We also report how many of our complaints were considered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and their decision.

The SPSO undertook a review of the Complaints Handling Procedure in 2019/20, with the updated procedure implemented from 1 April 2021. The changes included the introduction of a third outcome of “resolved” and a review of the key performance indicators. Further information is available at www.spsos.org.uk/the-model-complaints-handling-procedures

Complaints Handling Procedure

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of the service provided by or on behalf of the council. This includes a failure to follow the proper administrative processes, delays in responding to service requests and enquiries, failure to provide a service to the expected standard, dissatisfaction with Council policies and treatment by or attitude of a member of staff.

All complaints received from customers and service-users are managed under the two stage complaints procedure:

Stage 1: This stage is also known as Frontline Resolution as these complaints should be straightforward. A Stage 1 complaint could mean immediate action to resolve the matter. These complaints should be answered in 5 working days. Most complaints should be dealt with at Stage 1.

Stage 2: This stage is also known as the Investigation stage. A Stage 2 complaint may be a concern that has not been successfully resolved at Stage 1 and therefore escalated or refers to a matter that is complex and requires a full and detailed investigation. Stage 2 complaints should be answered in 20 working days.

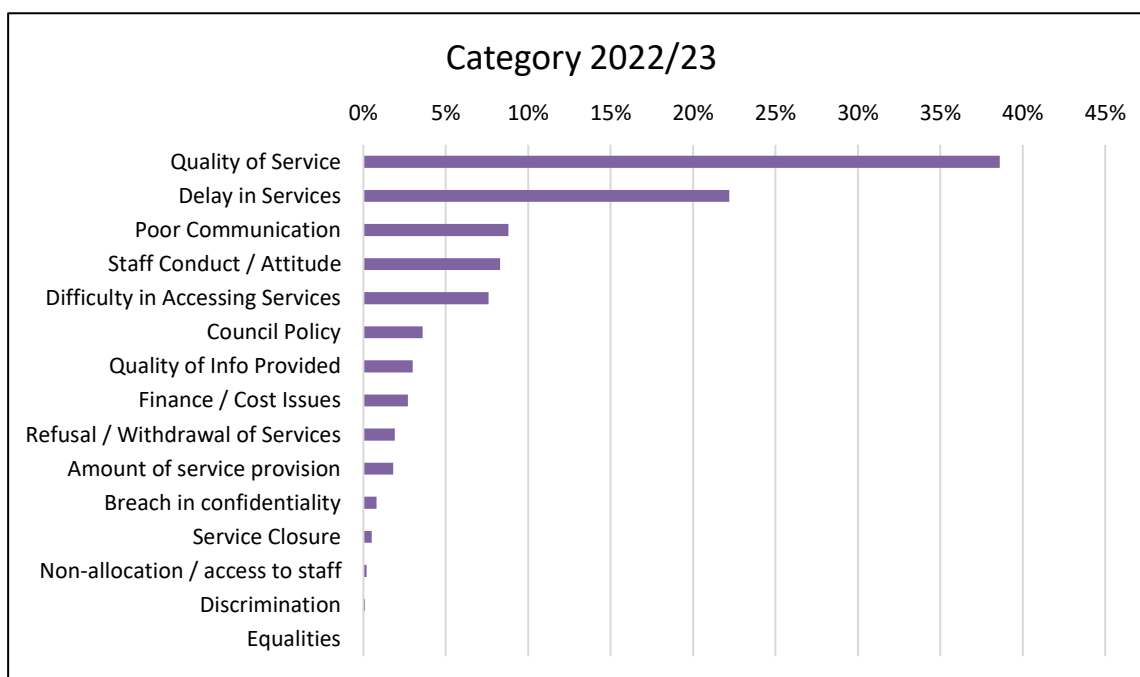
A person can make a complaint by using our online form or in person at any council office. To find your local council office, please visit our website: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

2022/23 Summary

In 2022/23, Aberdeen City Council received 1,348 complaints overall. A complaint may refer to more than one issue, therefore we categorised each point raised to reflect the different concerns. The percentage of complaint points received for each category is shown below in alphabetical order and in order of category with the highest to lowest percentage. Both versions have been included after receiving this suggestion from a citizen regarding our 2021/22 report.

We can see that the majority of complaints received have referred to delays and the quality of service provided. This is consistent with previous years.

Category	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Amount of Service Provision	1.8%	4.2%	14.2%	4.8%
Breach in Confidentiality	0.8%	0.5%	1.0%	0.8%
Council Policy	3.6%	4.4%	5.3%	4.9%
Delay in Services	22.2%	24.7%	16.9%	13.0%
Difficulty in Accessing Services	7.6%	7.4%	5.8%	5.9%
Discrimination	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
Equalities	0%	0%	0%	0%
Finance / Cost Issues	2.7%	1.6%	3.3%	1.9%
Non-allocation / access to staff	0.2%	0%	0%	0.1%
Poor Communication	8.8%	9.5%	6.1%	9.8%
Quality of Info Provided	3%	4.9%	7.1%	5.6%
Quality of Service	38.6%	31.7%	26.6%	36.2%
Staff Conduct / Attitude	8.3%	10.0%	12.25	15.1%
Refusal / Withdrawal of Services	1.9%	0.7%	1.0%	1.6%
Service Closure	0.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%



Performance Indicators

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have outlined four key performance indicators for local authorities to use to monitor practice and identify any trends. The performance for 2022/23 has been provided, with comparison to the previous financial year where possible to show development or any areas that require improvement.

Indicator One – Total Number of Complaints Received

This indicator records the total number of complaints received. 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 complaints received directly at Stage 2.

For benchmarking purposes, it is helpful to show this information as the number of complaints received per 1,000 population. This provides a consistent benchmark and indicator relevant to the size of our organisation.

In 2022/23 we received 1,348 Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints overall, which is stable with the figures for 2021/22. There were significantly less complaints received in 2020/21 due to the impact of Covid-19 compared to other years.

	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Aberdeen City Population	227,430	227,430	229,060	227,560
Total Complaints Received	1,348	1,350	1,063	1,465
Per 1,000 Population	5.9	5.9	4.6	6.4

The National Records of Scotland (www.nrscotland.gov.uk) have yet to release the population estimate for 2022/23 and so the figures have been compared to the population estimate for 2021/22.

Indicator Two – Closed Complaints within the set timescales

The complaints handling procedure requires that Stage 1 complaints be closed within five working days and that Stage 2 complaints be closed within 20 working days. This indicator shows the total number of complaints closed within the standard timescale as a percentage of all complaints received.

The overall performance for all complaints closed within timescale was 60.7%, a slight reduction from the previous financial year (61.47%).

The reason why delays occur will continue to be explored and addressed with services in 2023/24. Increased monitoring and training with the appropriate service areas will take place. A specific focus on Stage 2 responses where it is evident that performance has decreased will be targeted. We also note we received a higher number of Stage 2 complaints in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22.

Complaints closed within timescale	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Stage 1	66.1%	64.69%	71.58%	64.36%
Stage 2	37.14%	44.92%	54.63%	35.03%
Escalated Stage 2	38.03%	48.00%	68.60%	55.37%
All	60.7%	61.47%	69.61%	60.4%

Whilst we aim to respond to complaints as quickly as we can and within the standard timescales, this may not always be possible; for a quality investigation to be carried out, an extension may be required. In these circumstances, an extension may be sought, and a revised deadline provided. See Indicator Six for these figures.

Indicator Three – Average time in working days

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

The performance for Stage 2 complaints has reduced since last year. A main reason for this is our continued increase in focus on the quality of responses provided. We aim to provide a clear and transparent description of the investigation and findings, and in some circumstances, this has meant a response has taken longer to be issued. As explained above, targeted training will take place for key responding officers in order to reduce the time spent on quality assurance of responses and subsequently reduce the average working days to respond.

Average Working Days to Respond	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Stage 1	6.8	6.7	5.8	6.5
Stage 2	27.1	25.0	22.0	25.3
Escalated Stage 2	27.0	23.9	18.6	21.6

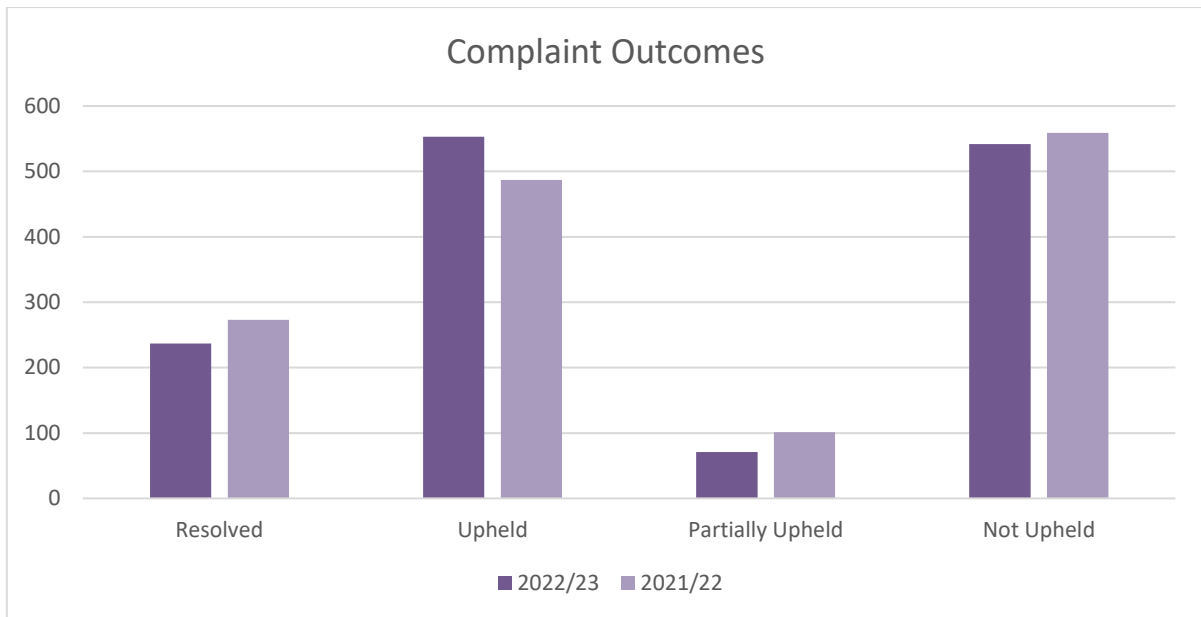
Indicator Four – Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld.

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. These outcomes are “resolved”, “upheld”, “partially upheld” or “not upheld”.

A complaint is “resolved” when both the complainant and investigating officer agree that action can or has been taken that provides a full resolution to the complaint and no further investigation is necessary. This outcome was introduced in April 2021.

Where we have identified failings, the complaint would be recorded as “upheld”. However, where it is found that procedures had been followed or the service provided as expected, a complaint would be recorded as “not upheld”. Where there are several points to a complaint and the decisions are a mixture of “upheld” and “not upheld”, the complaint is recorded as “partially upheld” overall.

The chart below shows the outcomes for 2022/23 complaints at all stages of the process compared to 2021/22. We can see that there has been a slight increase in “upheld” complaints in 2022/23 and this could be interpreted that there have been more service failings. It is also positive we have recognised where we have not provided a satisfactory experience to our customers and can use this as a learning experience to improve.



Indicator Five – Performance against Timescales

We are required to respond to a Stage 1 complaint within 5 working days and a Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days.

As advised above, Stage 2 performance has reduced slightly in comparison to last year following an increased focus on the quality of responses provided and an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received.

Percentage of Complaints Closed within Timescale	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Stage 1	66.1%	64.69%	71.58%	64.36%
Stage 2	37.14%	44.92%	54.63%	35.03%
Escalated Stage 2	38.03%	48%	68.60%	55.37%
All	60.7%	61.47%	69.61%	60.4%

Indicator Six – Number of cases where an extension is authorised

Where a response has taken longer to be issued, an update is given to the complainant with a new date for response. Please note that when an extension is authorised, the complaint is still considered “late” and is therefore not included in the Within Timescale figures.

Stage 1 complaints may be extended by a further 5 working days. The timeframe for an extension to a Stage 2 complaint investigation is not set and is determined based on factors such as the nature of the complaint, the evidence available and if the complaint relates to more than one service or department.

We have seen a decrease in the number of extensions issues for complaints. Due to this, greater emphasis will be placed on the importance of updating complainants on the progress of their complaint.

Number of Complaints with an Extension	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Stage 1	26	47	30	60
Stage 2	20	22	20	42
Escalated Stage 2	13	19	14	16

Indicator Seven – Customer Satisfaction

A customer satisfaction survey is issued to customers following the closure of their complaint to establish if the complaint was handled to their satisfaction and to identify areas of improvement. The feedback is used to inform the content of training sessions held with officers to ensure that the sessions target the relevant issues.

Feedback from the surveys centred around a delay in receiving their complaint response and lack of communication regarding the delay. We also noted that despite being advised in responses that work would be carried out e.g. a pothole repaired or a repair carried out to their home, the works were not completed. This has provided us with valuable feedback and aspects that we can focus on in the coming year.

We received positive feedback about the how easy it was to raise a complaint and that complaints were handled well overall.

Indicator Eight – Learning from complaints

Upon closure of every complaint, we identify any learning points. This is particularly important where complaints are upheld, but even a complaint which is not upheld can highlight the need for change.

Some examples of the improvements made as a result of complaints in 2022/23 are outlined in the following table:

Complaint Topic	Action Taken
Wording on our website for birth registration.	The website was updated to make the steps of registering a birth clearer.
The Customer Service desk at the front of Marischal College.	We have been implementing improvements within the Customer Service Centre to improve the customer experience. This includes the removal of the desk which will be concluded in the coming weeks.
A customer's dissatisfaction regarding being unable to speak to a Trading Standards Officer directly via telephone.	Our Trading Standards team have introduced a call back service if there are no Officers available at the time of the call.
A parent's concerns regarding bullying at their child's school.	The school's Anti-Bullying Policy was updated and all bullying allegations will be formally recorded.
Our phone system causing delays in conversation and making it difficult to speak with members of staff.	A new phone system was implemented and feedback taken onboard.
Our Housing and Building Services teams providing conflicting information to a customer.	A process has been implemented for one staff member to take ownership to see the case from start to finish.

A customer's dissatisfaction at our lack of engagement regarding their financial matters.

Mandatory training was rolled out to staff members.

A member of staff had not been in touch with a customer about concerns regarding their home.

Revised arrangement for when staff on annual leave were put in place.

Complaints considered by the SPSO

SPSO Cases	2022/23 (Current)	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Investigated	2	2	4	2
Upheld	1	1	1	2
Not Upheld	0	0	2	0
Partially Upheld	1	1	1	0

Once a complaint has been dealt with at Stage 2 of the Complaints Handling Procedure, complainants may approach the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) if they remain dissatisfied. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland, including complaints about a Local Authority.

In 2022/23, the SPSO felt it appropriate to investigate two complaints. One complaint was upheld and the other was partially upheld. Both required action to be taken by Aberdeen City Council, with recommendations made by the SPSO.

Findings are published regularly on the SPSO's website, including decision reports for complaints handled by Aberdeen City Council at www.spsso.org.uk/spsso.

Contact Us

As a council, we encourage people to give us their feedback on the services we provide. Please visit www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/complaints for more information about the Complaints Handling Procedure or to submit any feedback you may have.