

## **Aberdeen City Council**

### **Annual Complaints Performance Report 2020/21**

#### **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.

#### **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 refer to our website.

## 2020/21 Summary

In 2020/21, Aberdeen City Council received 1,063 complaints overall. A complaint may refer to more than one issue, therefore we categorised each point raised in order to reflect the different concerns. The percentage of complaint points received for each category is shown below.

Category	2020/21
Amount of Service Provision	14.2%
Breach of Confidentiality	1.0%
Council Policy	5.3%
Delay in Services	16.9%
Difficulty in Accessing Services	5.8%
Discrimination	0.2%
Finance/Cost Issues	3.3%
Non-Allocation / access to staff	0.0%
Poor Communication	6.1%
Quality of Information Provided	7.1%
Quality of Service	26.6%
Refusal/Withdrawal of Service	1.0%
Service closure	0.1%
Staff Conduct/Attitude	12.2%

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have outlined a variety of indicators as a basis for monitoring complaints handling performance. The performance for complaints from 2019/20 and 2020/21 has been detailed in order to provide a comparison.

### Indicator One – Complaints received per 1,000 Population

In order to determine the number of complaints received per 1,000 population, we count those received at Stage 1 and received directly at Stage 2.

In 2020/21 we received XXX Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, which is a XXX increase from the previous year. This increase follows some changes to council services over the year, including the introduction of a chargeable garden waste collection permit and suspension of some council services in response to the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Aberdeen City Population</b>	229,060	227,560
<b>Total Complaints Received</b>	1,063	1,465
<b>Per 1,000 Population</b>	4.6	6.4

According to the National Records of Scotland ([www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk)), the population estimate for Aberdeen City has reduced slightly since 2019/20.

### Indicator Two – Closed Complaints

The majority of complaints were handled at Stage 1 which is as expected. It is our aim to provide quick responses to straight-forward issues and deal with complex matters at Stage 2. There has

been an increase in the number of escalated Stage 2 complaints, therefore consideration will be given as to identifying complaints that should be handled at Stage 2 directly.

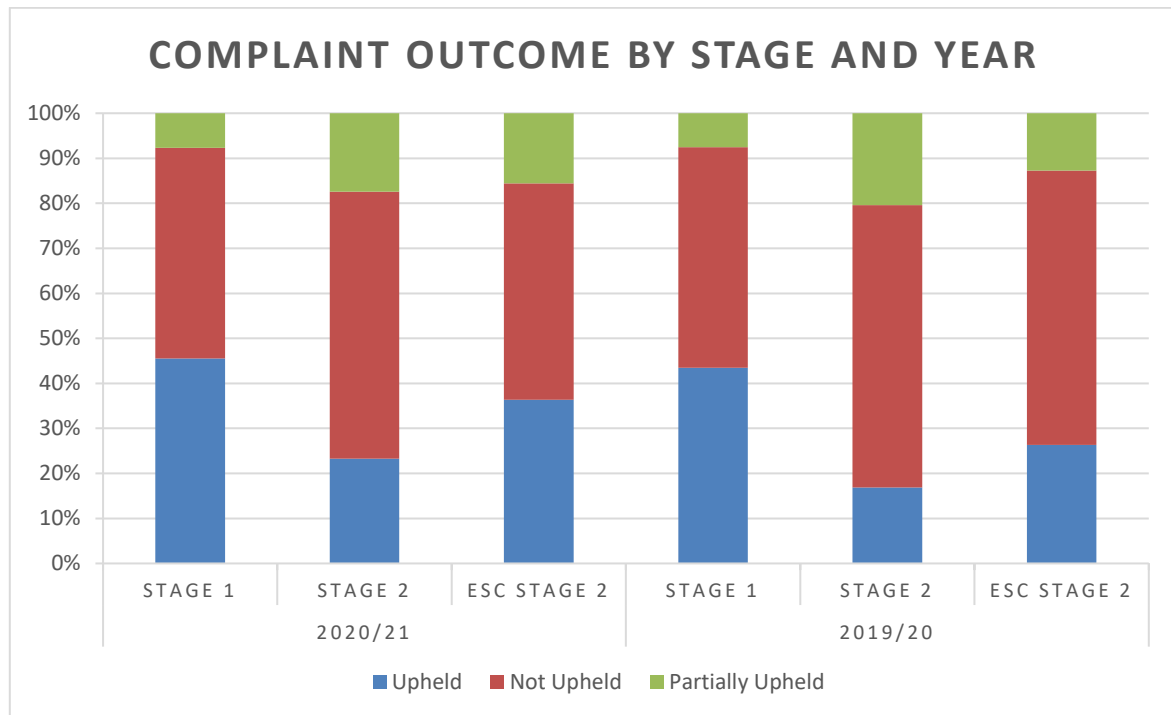
Complaints Received	2020/21	% Total	2019/20	% Total
<b>All</b>	1063	-	1444	-
<b>Stage 1</b>	869	81.75%	1192	82.55%
<b>Stage 2</b>	108	10.16%	142	9.83%
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	86	8.09%	110	7.62%

**Indicator Three – Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld.**

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

If it were found that procedures had been followed or the service provided as expected, a complaint would be recorded as “not upheld”. However, if this was not the case the complaint would be recorded as “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 show the number of complaints upheld, not upheld and partially upheld at each stage of the complaint procedure for the current and previous financial year. There is no significant change to the outcomes across the different stages, which indicates a consistent approach is taken in complaint handling.



**Indicator Four – Average Response Times**

The table below shows the average working days taken to respond to closed complaints at each stage of the complaint procedure.

There has been an overall improvement in the time taken to respond to complaints at each stage, with fewer working days required. This may be due to there being fewer complaint cases received than the previous year.

Average Working Days to Respond	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	5.8	6.5
<b>Stage 2</b>	22.0	25.3
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	18.6	21.6

#### 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 mentioned previously, there has been an improvement in complaint timescales and this is reflected in the percentage of complaints closed within time, shown in the below table. It is our aim for at least 75% of complaints to be responded to within the timescales outlined in the Complaints Handling Procedure, therefore we will continue to consider how we can improve performance.

Percentage of Complaints Closed within Timescale	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	71.58%	64.36%
<b>Stage 2</b>	54.63%	35.03%
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	68.60%	55.37%
<b>All</b>	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.

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 can see that fewer extensions have been given for complaints, this is expected given the improvement to response timescales, with less delays experienced.

Number of Complaints with an Extension	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	30	60
<b>Stage 2</b>	20	42
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	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.

The survey results will be published on the Aberdeen City Council website for 2020/21 in a separate report.

### 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.

A sample of the improvements made as a result of complaints in 2020/21 are outlined in the following table.

Complaint Topic	Action Taken
Customer reported difficulty in renewing Access to Leisure	We updated the website with clearer information about the renewal process
Customer advised they were given incorrect advice about a licensing application	We updated our staff training and guidance accordingly
Customer advised our guidance on home education was out of date	Our website page for Home Education is now reviewed at regular intervals and updated in accordance with new Scottish Government guidance.
Customer had contacted a member of staff directly, however received no response.	A new email address was created this team, meaning that emails are not missed due to a member of staff being unavailable due to absence or annual leave.
A customer's National Entitlement Card was not accepted as a valid form of identification when they visited Hazlehead Waste and Recycling Centre.	Although the National Entitlement Card is not recognised as a form of identification, we reviewed alternative forms of ID that could be used
Customer explained they were not aware that conversations with a member of staff would be included in a report	We reviewed how staff inform people about how their information will be handled, such as creating a leaflet.
Customer reported difficulty in finding the contact details for a specific department	We updated the website to ensure the contact information was in a more prominent place
Customer explained that there had been delays in their reports of antisocial behaviour being dealt with	We updated our procedures to encourage quicker, collaborative action with our Antisocial Behaviour Unit and Police Scotland

### Complaints considered by the SPSO

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.

SPSO Cases	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Investigated</b>	4	2
Upheld	1	2
Not Upheld	2	0
Partially Upheld	1	0

This year, the SPSO investigated four complaints dealt with by Aberdeen City Council. Of these, two were not upheld with no further action required. We were informed that one case was upheld, and another partially upheld. For these complaints, the SPSO recommended actions to be taken by Aberdeen City Council in order to address the concerns raised.

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](http://www.spsso.org.uk/spsso).

### **Changes**

In 2019/20, the SPSO conducted a review of the Complaints Handling procedure. This review led to the content of the procedure being updated following feedback from organisations under the SPSO's jurisdiction and referred to research and good practice in relation to using alternative resolution approaches and improving access to complaints for vulnerable groups.

The updated procedure will be implemented from 1 April 2021, with a third outcome of "resolved" introduced. It is anticipated the additional outcome will enable organisations to quickly identify appropriate solutions to some complaints, without the need for an in-depth investigation or detailed response.

Any changes to reporting will be reflected in future reports.

### **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](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/complaints) for more information about the Complaints Handling Procedure or to submit any feedback you may have.