



ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20

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Chief Executive's Foreword

I am pleased to present Argyll and Bute Council's Annual Complaints Report which provides information about our performance in handling complaints from customers between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.



Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing high quality services for residents, businesses and visitors in our area. With the Covid-19 pandemic hitting our country in early 2020, our priorities changed to ensure essential services continued. Our customers and employees adjusted to different ways of doing things, different working environments, and many taking on new tasks to deliver lifeline support to our local residents and businesses. During this time I received many messages of praise towards our services and employees and I am pleased to share some of these messages within this report.

We strive to be thorough, transparent, objective and fair in our approach to complaints, and to make it as easy as possible for customers to access our complaints procedure through our website, by email, over the telephone or in person. I understand it can be disappointing and frustrating when your expectations are not met. We welcome and value complaints and feedback from our customers as it allows us to continue to improve service delivery. Some examples of those improvements made are included within this report.

It has been a challenging year, with structural changes taking place within our services, and the unprecedented situation of the pandemic. Despite these challenges, complaints decreased significantly and I thank all the staff in my organisation for doing what they do best, going the extra distance to provide the best possible services and support to the people of Argyll and Bute that we can deliver.

Pippa Milne

Chief Executive – Argyll and Bute Council

Introduction

Argyll and Bute Council, along with all other Scottish Local Authorities, follow a model complaints handling procedure which is determined by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO). This report presents how Argyll and Bute Council has performed against 8 key performance indicators set by the SPSO, and provides some details about improvements to our services along with some positive feedback from our customers.

Complaints process

Complaints can be either Stage 1, which are usually straightforward issues and must be dealt with in 5 days or less, or Stage 2, which are usually about more complex or serious issues and can take up to 20 days for a response to be provided. If a customer is not happy with a Stage 2 response, they can refer their complaint on to the SPSO, who will look at the issues raised and can investigate the matter.



What is a complaint?

A complaint is 'an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council'.

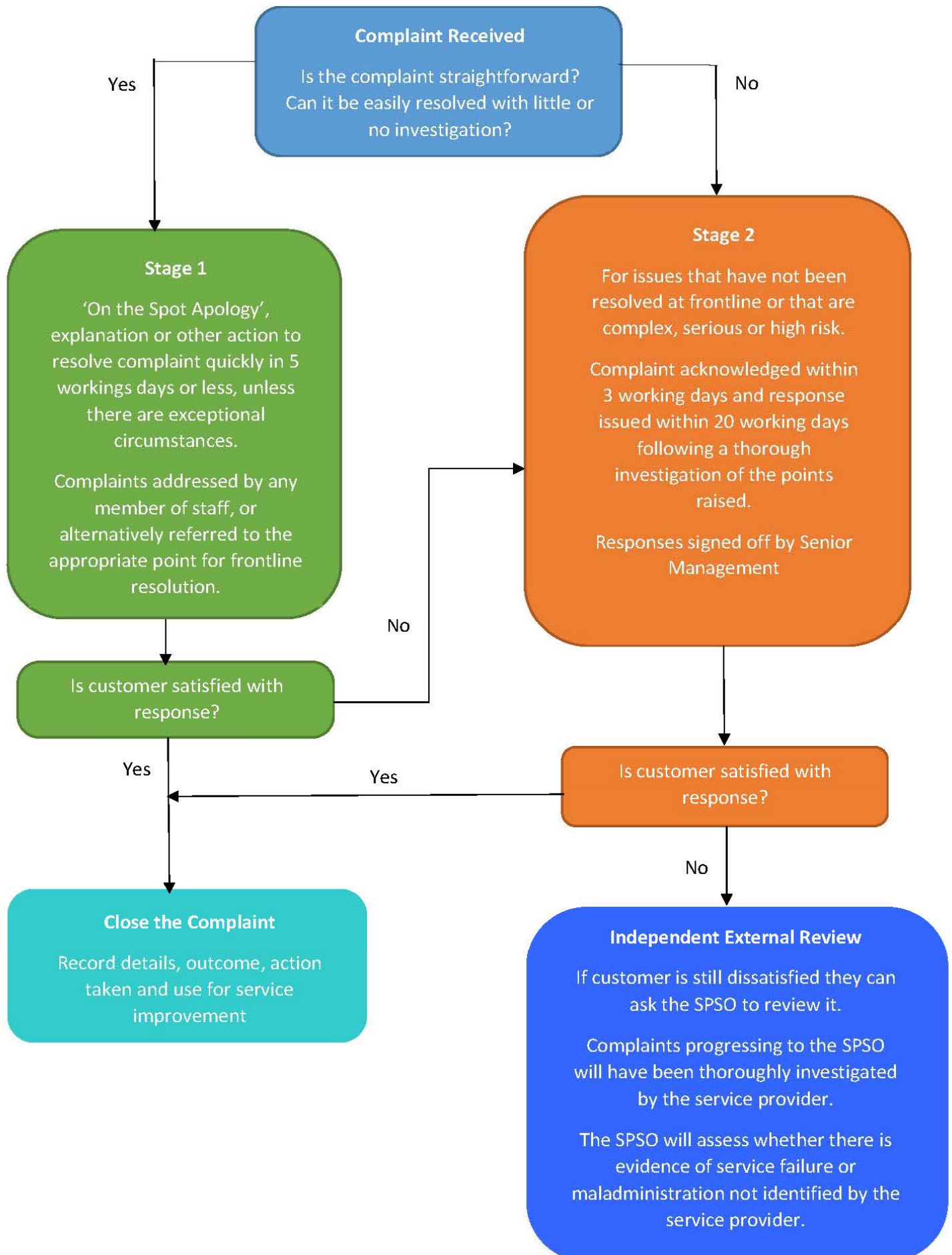
In most cases a complaint will be made because the customer considers that the Council has:

- Done something wrong
- Failed to live up to expectations
- Treated someone badly or unfairly

The process map on the following page outlines our process.



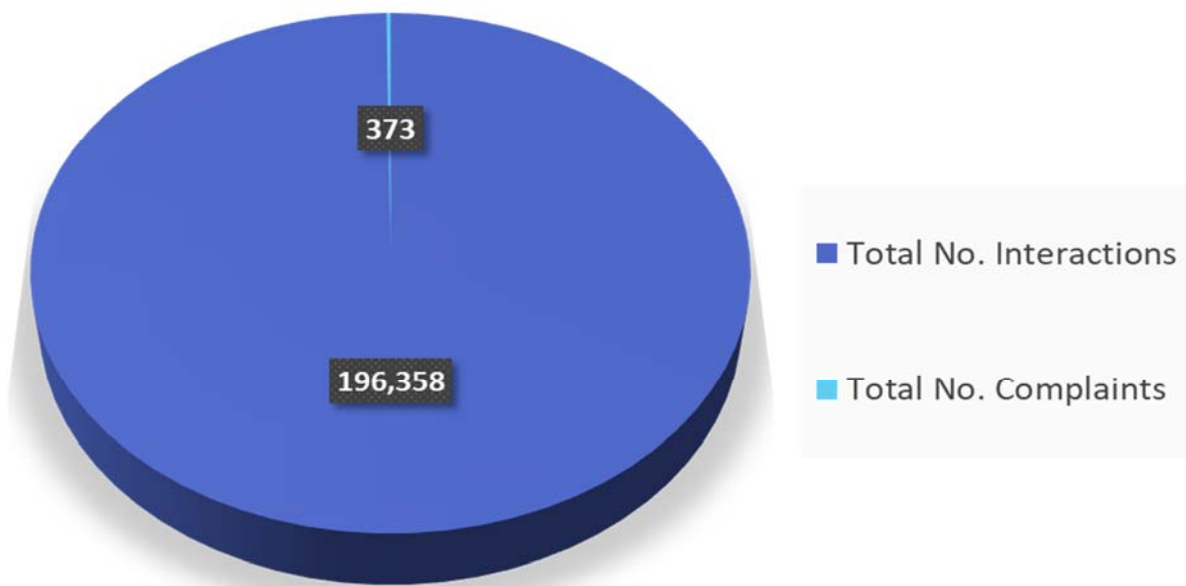
Complaints Process



Customer Contact

Argyll and Bute Council has many interactions with customers every day through various channels including email, telephone and through our website. Complaints from customers only form a very small number of the interactions that are logged through our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. In 2019/20 Argyll and Bute Council logged 196,358 incidents through the CRM system. Of these 196,358 incidents only 373 of these were complaints. This equates to less than 0.2% as shown below.

Customer Interactions



Indicator 1—Complaints Received per 1,000 of Population

This section details the total number of complaints handled by Argyll and Bute Council between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. To allow a fair comparison to be made across all 32 Scottish councils, this indicator looks at the figure of “complaints per 1,000 of population”.

In 2019/2020 Argyll and Bute received, processed and closed **373** complaints.

The population of Argyll and Bute is estimated at around **86,260***



This means there were **4.3** complaints per **1,000 population**, or roughly **1** resident in **232** made a complaint about our services. A comparison of this indicator over the past 3 years is shown in the table below.

Year	No. of Complaints	Complaints Per 1,000 Population
2019/20	373	4.3
2018/19	552	6.4
2017/18	498	5.7

**This information is based on the mid-year population estimates prepared by the National Records of Scotland*

Indicator 2—Number of Complaints

This indicator provides information about the number of complaints closed at Stages 1 and 2, and the escalated complaints (when a customer is not satisfied with a stage 1 response, and it goes on to be dealt with as stage 2).

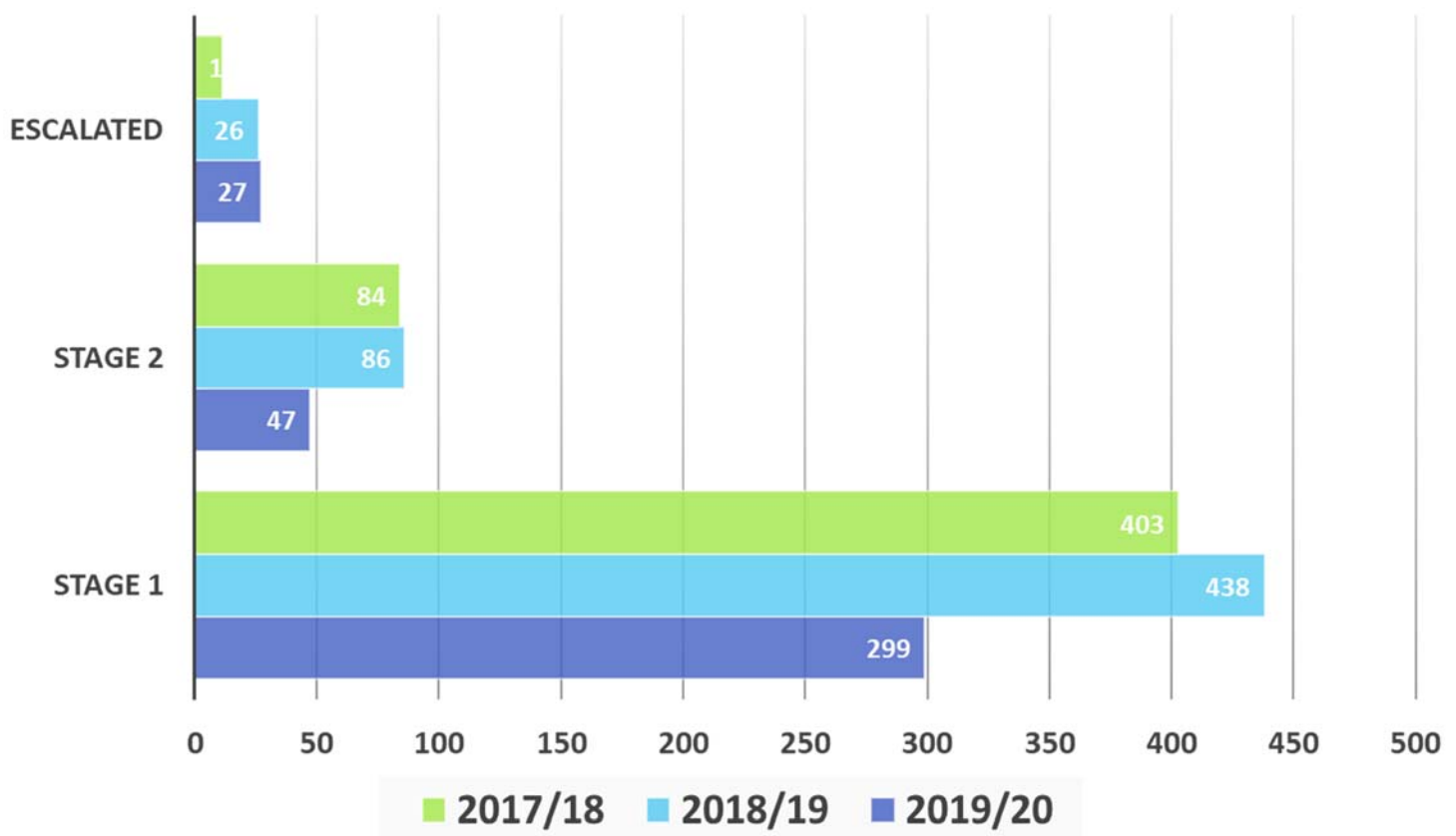
299 complaints were closed at Stage 1 – 80%

47 complaints were closed at Stage 2 – 13%

27 complaints were closed after escalation – 7%

The graph below shows a comparison between the number of complaints received at each stage over the past 3 years.

Number of Complaints



Indicator 3 — Complaint Outcomes

Stage 1

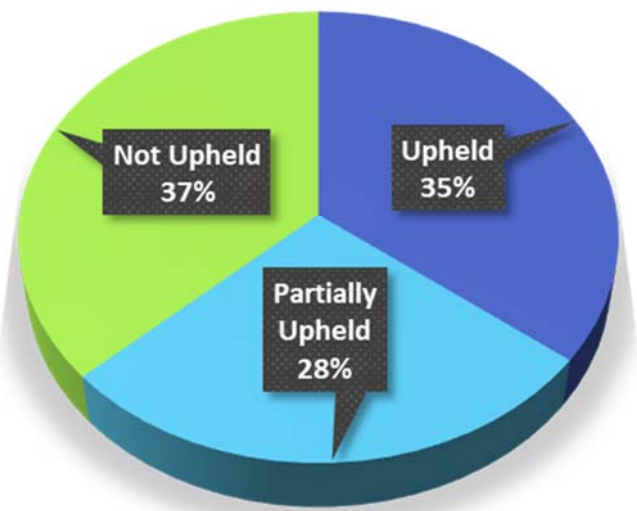
With every complaint, we contact the customer and explain what the outcome of their complaint was— Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld—and provide details about how this decision was made. The charts below provide a comparison of the outcomes for this year, and over the past 3 years.

2019/2020 Outcomes

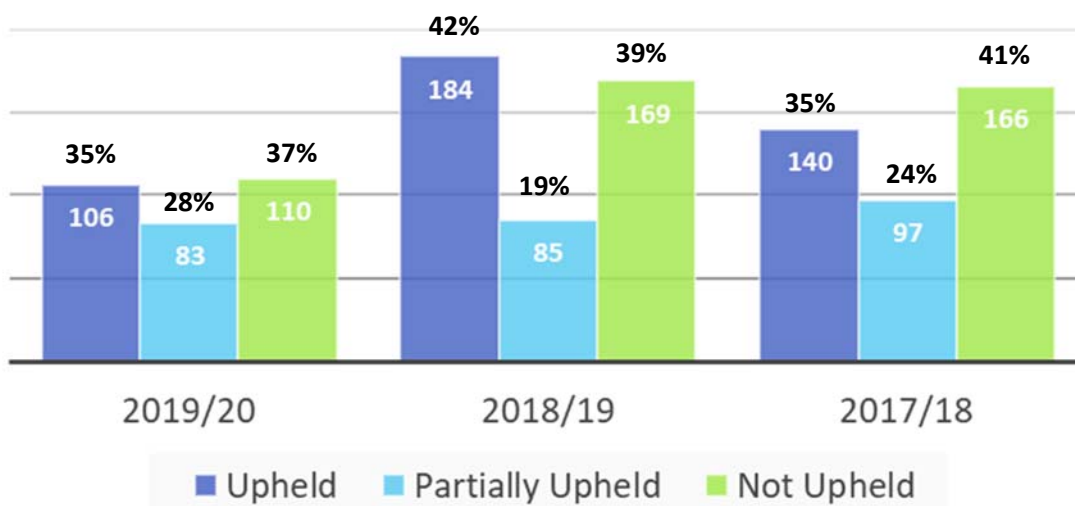
106 complaints were Upheld at Stage 1 – 35%

83 complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 1 – 28%

110 complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 1 – 37%



Stage 1 Outcomes - 3 Year Comparison

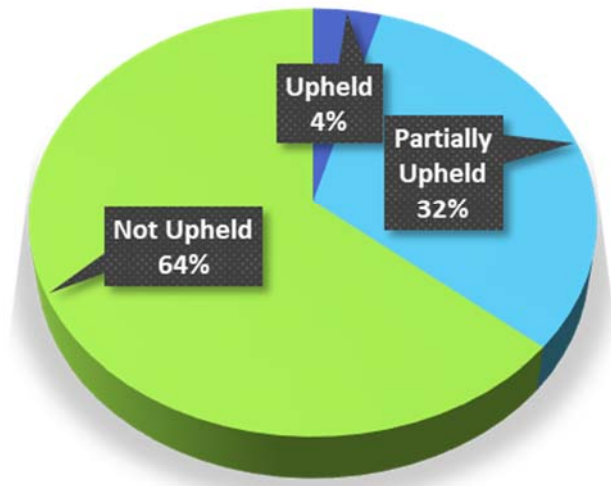


Indicator 3 — Complaint Outcomes

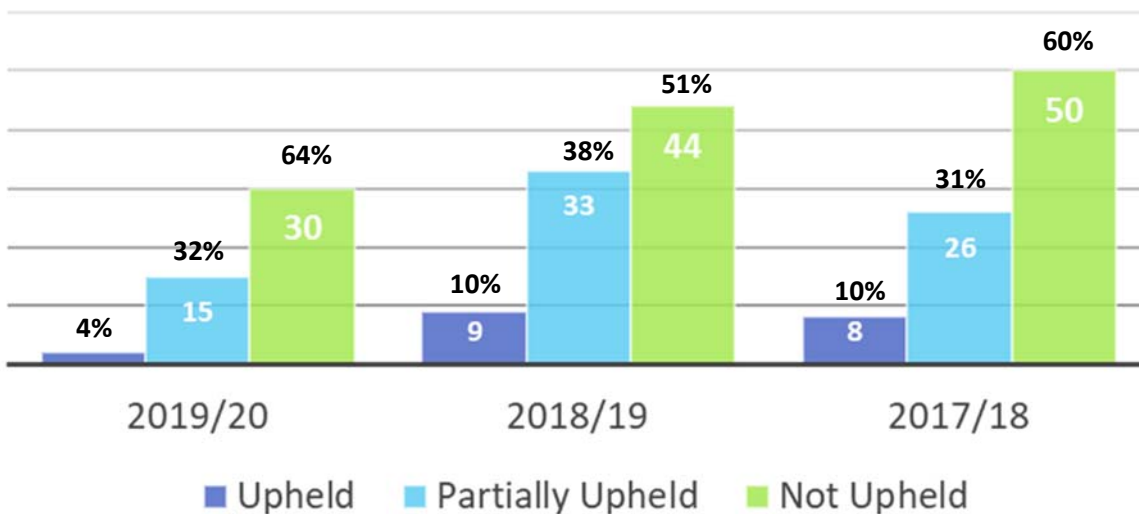
Stage 2

2019/2020 Outcomes

2 Complaints were Upheld at Stage 2 – 4%
 15 Complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 2 – 32%
 30 Complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 2 – 64%



Stage 2 Outcomes - 3 Year Comparison



Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes

Escalated Complaints

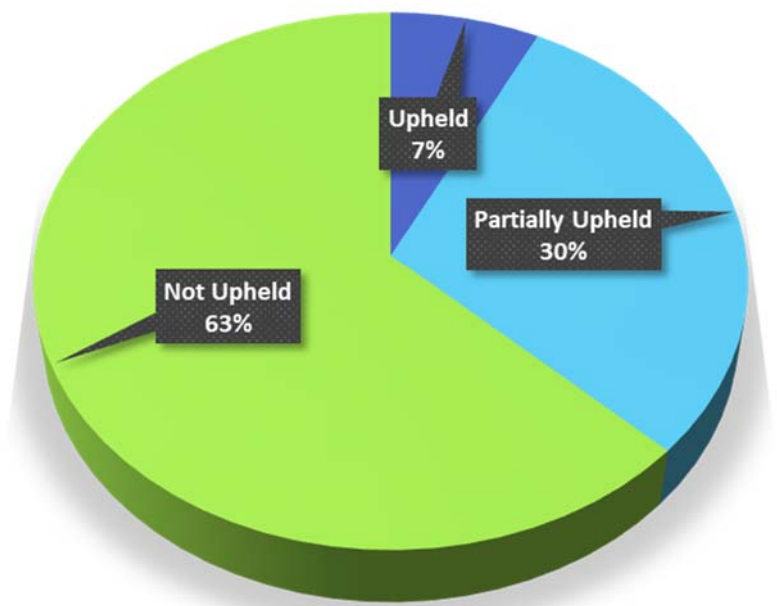
When a customer is not happy with a Stage 1 response, it is dealt with as a Stage 2 complaint—these are known as “Escalated Complaints”.

2019/2020 - Outcomes

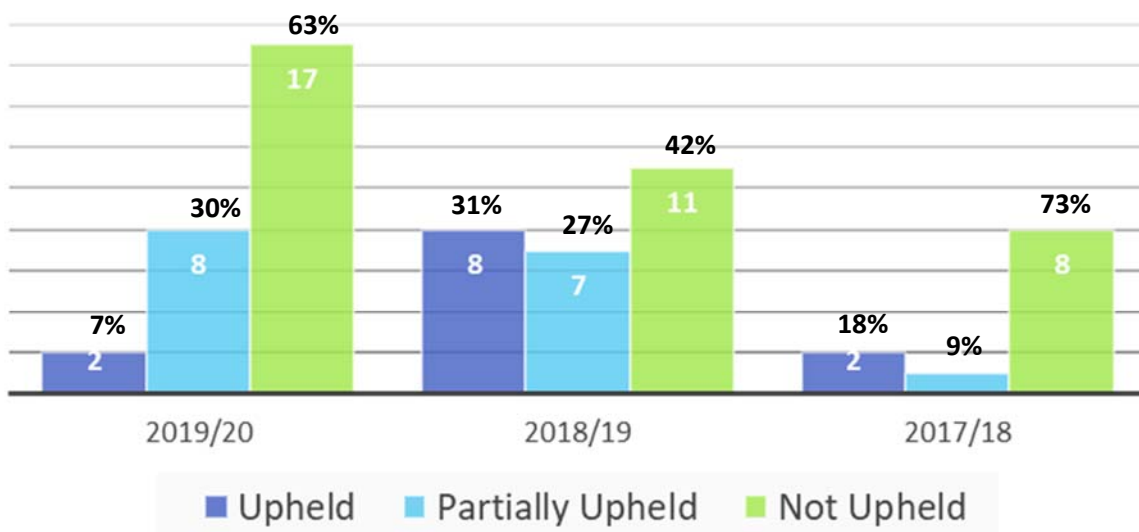
2 complaints were Upheld after escalation - 7%

8 complaints were Partially Upheld after escalation – 30%

17 complaints were Not Upheld after escalation – 63%



Escalated Outcomes - 3 Year Comparison



Indicator 4 – Average Times

Stage 1 – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2019/2020, we closed **299** complaints at Stage 1, with a total sum of **2,214 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was **7.4 working days**.

The figures for the last 3 years can be seen in the table below.

	No. Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2019/20	299	2214	7.4
2018/19	438	2810	6.4
2017/18	403	2488	6.2

Stage 2 – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**.

In 2019/ 2020, we closed **47** complaints at Stage 2, with a total sum of **1,002 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was **21.3 working days**.

The figures for the last 3 years can be seen in the table below.

	No. Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2019/20	47	1002	21.3
2018/19	86	1663	19.3
2017/18	84	1544	18.4

During the course of the year, regular performance reporting showed us that our performance against the 5 and 20 day timescales was declining. To address this, a monthly performance update was introduced, which is provided to all Heads of Service and Directors to allow them to take action with their Services if required.

Indicator 4 — Average Times

After Escalation – in 2019/2020, we closed **27** escalated complaints after Escalation, with a total sum of **523 working days**. Our average time to close a complaint after Escalation was **19.4 working days**.

The last three year's results can be seen below.

	No. Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2019/20	27	523	19.4
2018/19	26	400	15.4
2017/18	11	186	16.9



Indicator 5 — Performance Against Timescales

Stage 1 – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2019/2020 we closed **299** complaints at Stage 1 with **206** of these within timescale, or **68.9%**. **8 (2.7%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. Complaints Closed	Within Time-scale	%	No. with Extension	%
2019/20	299	206	68.9%	8	2.7%
2018/19	438	293	66.9%	22	5%
2017/18	403	275	68.2%	3	0.7%

Stage 2 – we aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2019/2020 we closed **47** complaints at Stage 2, with **26** of these within timescale, or **55.3%**. **10 (21.3%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. Complaints Closed	Within Time-scale	%	No. with Extension	%
2019/20	47	26	55.3%	10	21.3%
2018/19	86	56	65.1%	2	2.3%
2017/18	84	63	75%	3	3.6%

Complaints with extensions agreed do not count as within timescale, these are reported as late responses.

Indicator 5—Performance Against Timescales

After Escalation – in 2019/2020, we closed **27** complaints after Escalation, with **20** of these within timescale, or **74.1 %**. **2 (7.4%)** were closed after an extension was agree with the customer.

	No. Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2019/20	27	20	74.1%	2	7.4%
2018/19	26	15	57.7%	10	38.5%
2017/18	11	8	72.7%	0	0

Improvement Actions

Overall, our performance against indicators 4 and 5 has declined slightly this year, and we are keen to start to turn this trend around during 2020-21. In line with guidance from the SPSO, an updated complaints handling procedure is to be implemented in Scottish councils during 2021, and Argyll and Bute Council will deliver refresher and update training to staff ahead of this. Part of this training will focus on the importance of performance to timescales.



Indicator 6 — Extensions to Timescales

Part of the complaints handling procedure includes the option to seek an extension to the usual 5 or 20 day timescale, which should be agreed with the customer. This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed after an extension to the 5 or 20 day timeline was authorised.

Stage 1

8 Extensions agreed
2.7% of total complaints

Stage 2

10 extensions agreed
21.3% of total complaints

Escalated complaints

2 extensions agreed
7.4% of total complaints



Indicator 7 — Customer Satisfaction

Our customers are automatically issued with a short complaints process satisfaction survey once their complaint has been closed. The survey asks for feedback about the complaints process, and gives an opportunity to send us suggestions for improvements. The survey results are reviewed by the Complaints Co-ordinators quarterly, and the feedback can be used to improve how we handle complaints.

We received 54 responses to our survey during the year, which is just over 14% of all complaints received. A low response rate makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of how all of our customers feel about the complaints process.

50% of customers who responded to the survey indicated that they felt their complaint had been dealt with fairly.

48% of customers were very satisfied or satisfied with the complaints process.

From our review of the feedback provided through the surveys, we recognise that customers are often frustrated when an ongoing issue is not resolved through the complaints process.



Indicator 8 — Learning from Complaints — Reporting

Who looks at our complaints figures and trends?

Information about complaints figures and corrective action taken is reported regularly to senior managers and a quarterly report is submitted to the Strategic Management Team. This process ensures the appropriate level of scrutiny takes place.

Quarterly performance against the performance indicators is reported to the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN).

We are also required to report our complaints figures to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) by submitting an annual return.

How we report Complaints Performance and Trends to our Customers

We publish the quarterly and annual reports on our website: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/do-it-online/comments-and-complaints>



Indicator 8 — Learning from Complaints— Improvements

By dealing with complaints on a day-to-day basis, our Officers are able to make adjustments to processes when issues are raised. In general, no major policy or procedural changes were required in response to complaints, however, a number of minor changes or actions were taken in order to improve our services. Whilst these improvements may have been minor in the overall scale of activities within the Council, it is our hope that they have made significant changes to the quality of service received by our customers. Some examples of these improvements can be seen in the following case studies:

Case 1

An complaint was raised by a former employee about the length of time they had to wait to receive their P45.

After investigation it was confirmed that the timescale the customer had had to wait was unacceptable. A new staff leaver process map was designed, which allows for a full end to end leavers process to be completed and ensures that all documentation including the P45, pension papers etc. are sent at the appropriate time.

Case 2

Customer contacted the Council to request a service, and was given information by the Contact Centre. The service was not provided within the timescale advised, and when the customer got in touch to question this, different information was given about the timescale for delivery.

After investigating this issue, the Service involved provided accurate information to the Contact Centre Agents about the timing and expectations for this service, and added it to the Council's website.

Indicator 8 — Learning from Complaints — Improvements

Case 3

Complaint received about the lack of response and follow up to an appeals process. After investigating this complaint, the Service has set up a formal register for appeals to allow progress to be monitored and any case officer to provide an update to the Customer.

Departmental Complaints Co-ordinators attend regular meetings where learning points from the SPSO are shared and discussed. The feedback and suggestions from customer satisfaction surveys are also reviewed, and any potential improvement ideas are investigated and taken forward where appropriate.



Complaints Investigated by the SPSO

When a customer is not satisfied with our final response to a complaint, they can take it to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) and ask for the complaint to be investigated. The SPSO is the final arbiter for complaints about public services.

Cases passed to SPSO during 2019/2020

17 cases were received by the SPSO in relation to Argyll and Bute Council in 2019/2020. Of these, 6 were not progressed as they were either: premature (the complaint had not been taken through the Council's process first); withdrawn; or were outwith the SPSO's jurisdiction. 10 cases were resolved early—when the SPSO receives a complaint they ask the Council to provide information in connection with the complaint, and from that information the investigating officer decides whether the complaint should be pursued further. If they are satisfied that the Council dealt with the complaint appropriately, it does not proceed to the full investigation stage. 1 complaint was investigated by the SPSO and upheld—this was in relation to the investigation of a noise complaint and the SPSO issued recommendations to the service involved to bring this complaint to a resolution for the customer.

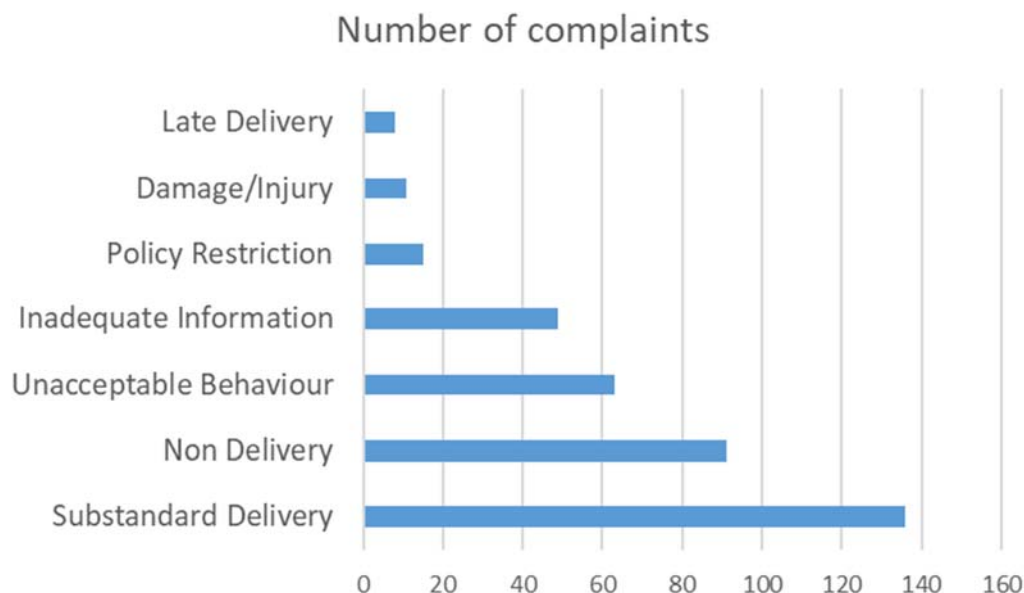
The SPSO publishes reports about all the organisations it has involvement with – more information is available from:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/statistics-2019-20>

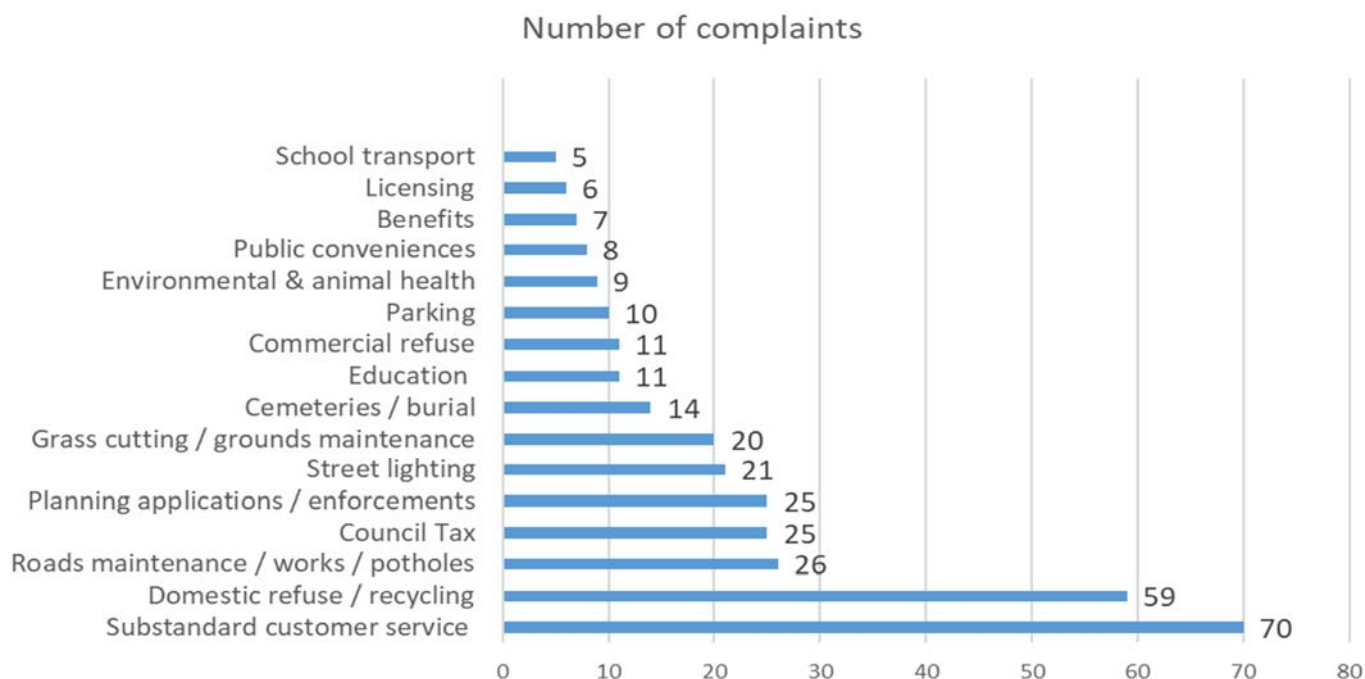


Complaint Themes

We record information about what type of complaints we receive, and have a standard set of categories that complaints generally fall into. The chart below shows how the complaints received have been classified during 2019-20.



This year, we have also captured information about what we believe the main theme of each complaint to be. This information will be provided (along with other levels of analysis) to our Elected Members and Senior Management to allow them to take this into consideration when making policy and service decisions. The chart below shows the main issues we have received complaints about. It includes all complaints where we received 5 or more in connection with a particular issue, these make up just over 87% of all complaints received in 2019-20.



Positive Feedback

I honestly can't thank you or your team enough for the help and assistance you have given us. It's been invaluable.

Thank you for a lovely ceremony and for the helpful, kind and excellent service in the run up to our marriage

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, A very professional and efficient approach to your job

The young girl who answered the phone was very, very kind and very understanding. Pleasure speaking to her. Thank you.

Absolutely fantastic and very, very helpful. Thank you.

I would like to add my appreciation to **you all** for all the hard work you are doing! Thank you

My experience of working with A&B building control has been very positive with a good turnaround of applications, consistent advice and helpful staff both as administrators



Here is just a small extract of the positive feedback that we have received this year. It is important to recognise that excellent services are being delivered, often in very challenging circumstances especially towards the end of 2019/20.

Positive Feedback

The Agent on the phone was extremely helpful and very, very patient and hopefully she's now having a wee lie down. Thanks very much.

Staff are very helpful, nice and do their jobs well, they do everything with a smile

To all of your hard working staff I thank you on behalf of my husband and myself for all your support and help in these very difficult times

Can I thank you all again for all the help Argyll and Bute have provided. It has been much appreciated and helped us out of a very difficult spot.

The staff in the Argyll & Bute office for the Roads & Amenities are always fantastic. Thank you.



Contact Us

Thank you for looking at our annual complaints report for 2019-20. If you would like to know more about our complaints procedure, details can be found on our website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/do-it-online/comments-and-complaints>

Or you can contact us using any of the methods below.

Phone – 01546 605522

Text – 07860023933

Post – Argyll and Bute Council, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT

Email - enquiries@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Online - <http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/content/enquiriesform>

