



# ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22

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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 our customers between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman brought in an updated complaints procedure, which we successfully implemented from 1 April 2021. Through this updated procedure, complaints in relation to our Social Work services are now managed under our overarching complaints procedure, and we have also started to make use of an alternative complaint outcome – where complaints can be resolved by our staff taking positive action and resolving the issue for the customer.



Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing high quality services for residents, businesses and visitors in our area. 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 are included within this report.

It has been a challenging year, as we worked through evolving national rules and guidance. I thank all the staff in my organisation for doing what they do best and going the extra distance to provide the best possible services and support to the people of Argyll and Bute.

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 eight key performance indicators set by the SPSO that are used by all 32 local authorities, 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 within 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.

Stage 1 → Stage 2 → SPSO

### 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.

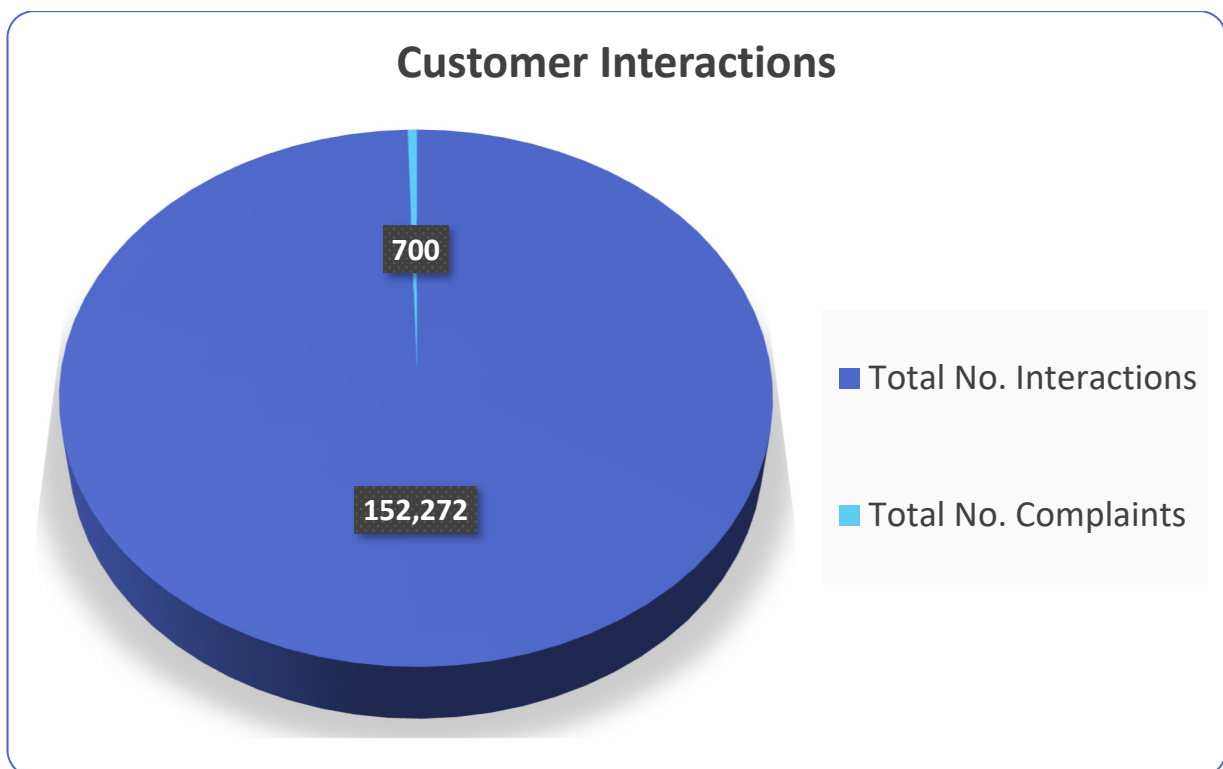


## Complaints Process



## 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 2021/22 Argyll and Bute Council logged 152,272 incidents through the CRM system. Of these 151,338 incidents, only 700 of these were complaints. This equates to less than 0.5% as shown below.



## 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 2021 and 31 March 2022. 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 2021/2022 Argyll and Bute received, processed and closed

**700**  
complaints.

The population of Argyll and Bute is estimated at around

**85,870\***



This means there were **8.2** complaints per **1,000 population**, or roughly **1** resident in **122** 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
2021/22	700	8.2
2020/21	407	4.7
2019/20	373	4.3

## 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).

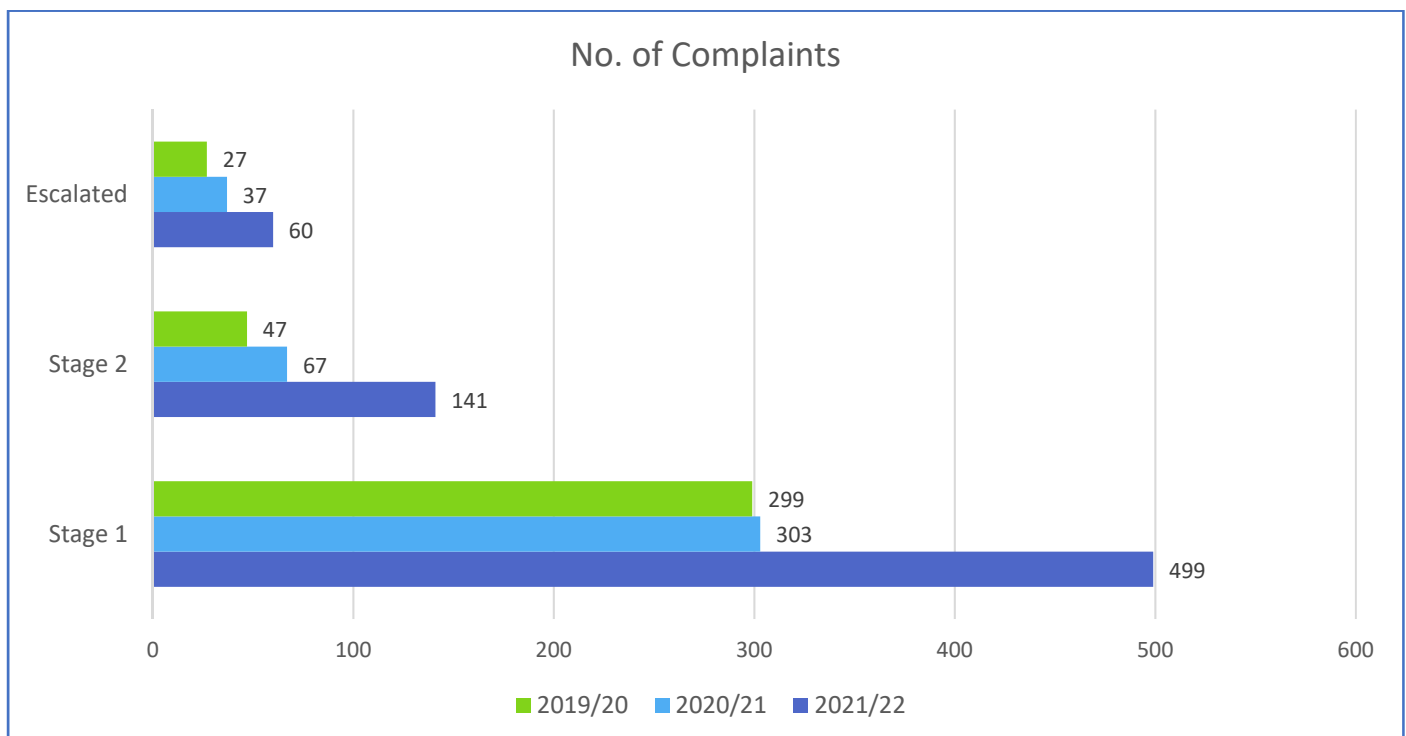
489 complaints were closed at Stage 1 – 70%

141 complaints were closed at Stage 2 – 20%

60 complaints were closed after escalation – 9%

10 complaints were not closed at Stage 1 within 10 days and were escalated to Stage 2

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





### Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes Stage 1

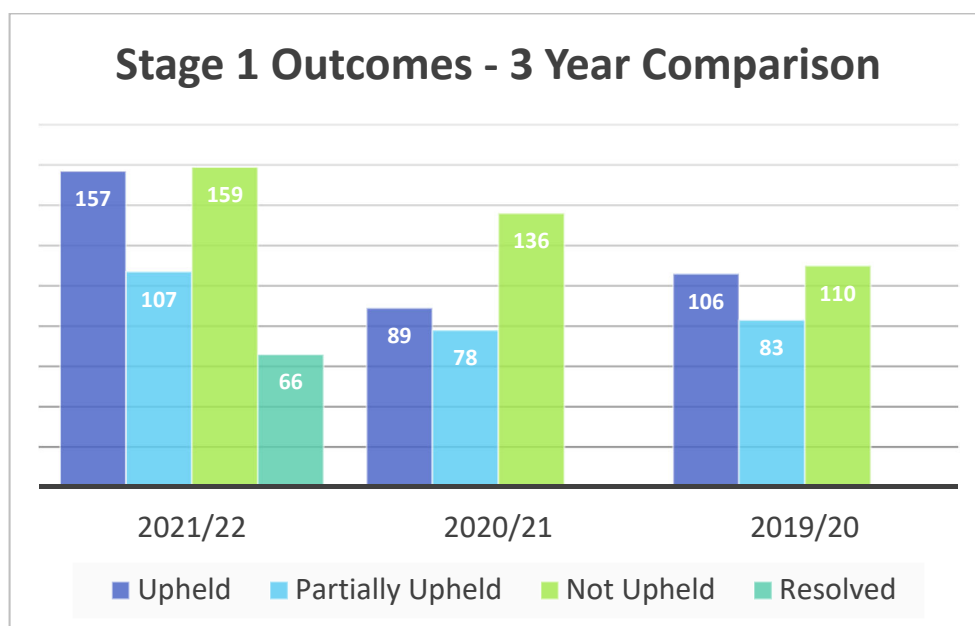
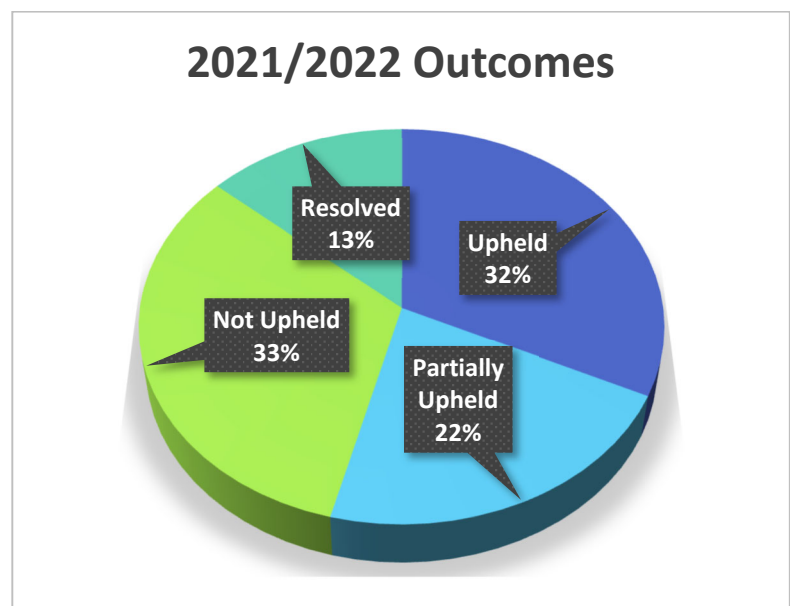
With every complaint, we contact the customer and explain what the outcome of their complaint was — Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld — and provide details about how this decision was made. The charts below provide a comparison of the outcomes for this year, and over the past 3 years. The “resolved” outcome was introduced with the new complaints handling procedure in April 2021, and is used when positive action can be taken to resolve the issue for the customer.

157 complaints were Upheld at Stage 1 – 32%

107 complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 1 – 22%

159 complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 1 – 33%

66 complaints were Resolved at Stage 1 – 13%



\*Resolved outcome only relevant to 2021/22 data

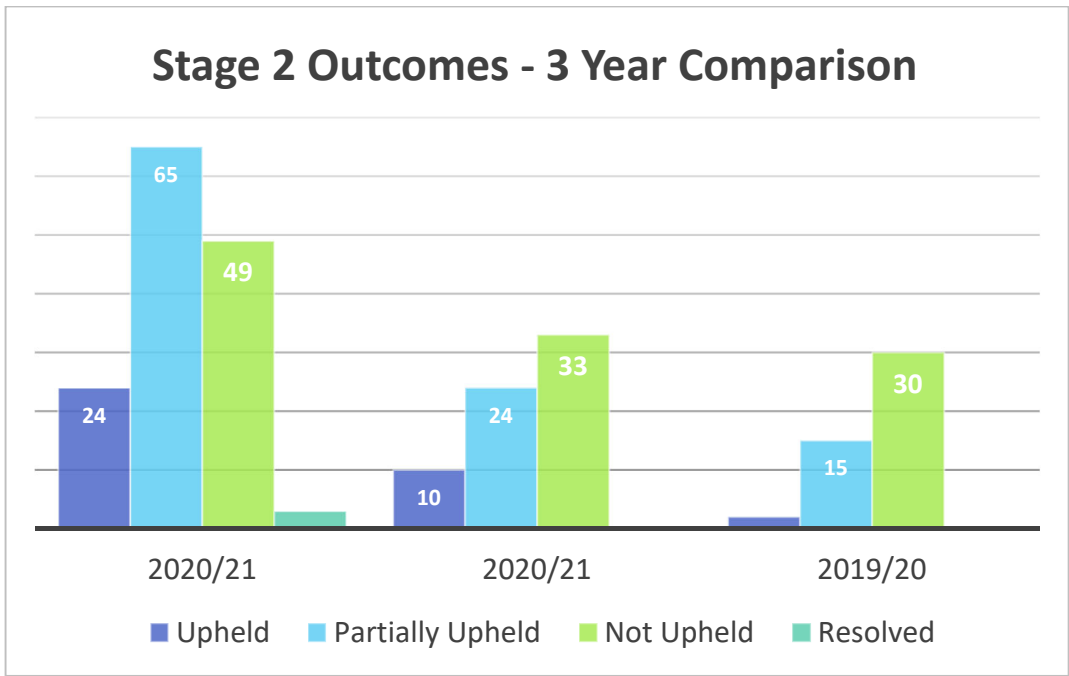
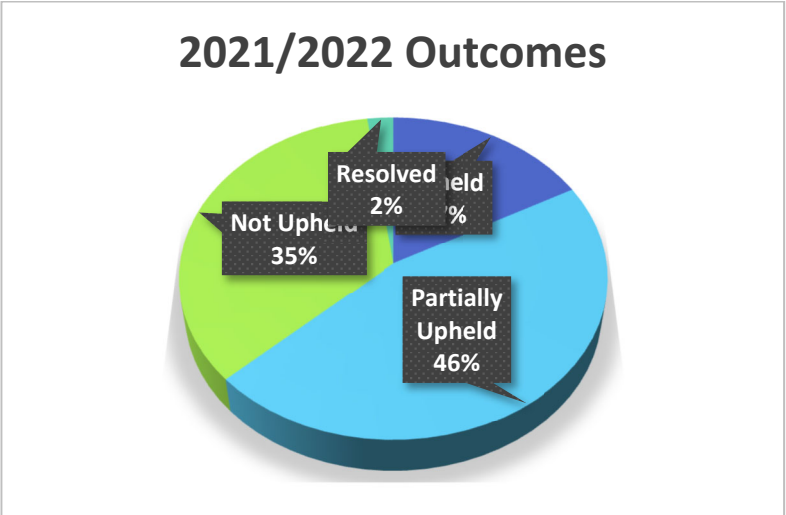
### Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes Stage 2

24 Complaints were Upheld at Stage 2 – 17%

65 Complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 2 – 46%

49 Complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 2 – 35%

3 Complaints were Resolved at Stage 2 – 2%



\*Resolved outcome only relevant to 2021/22 data

### Indicator 3 – Complaint Outcomes Escalated Complaints

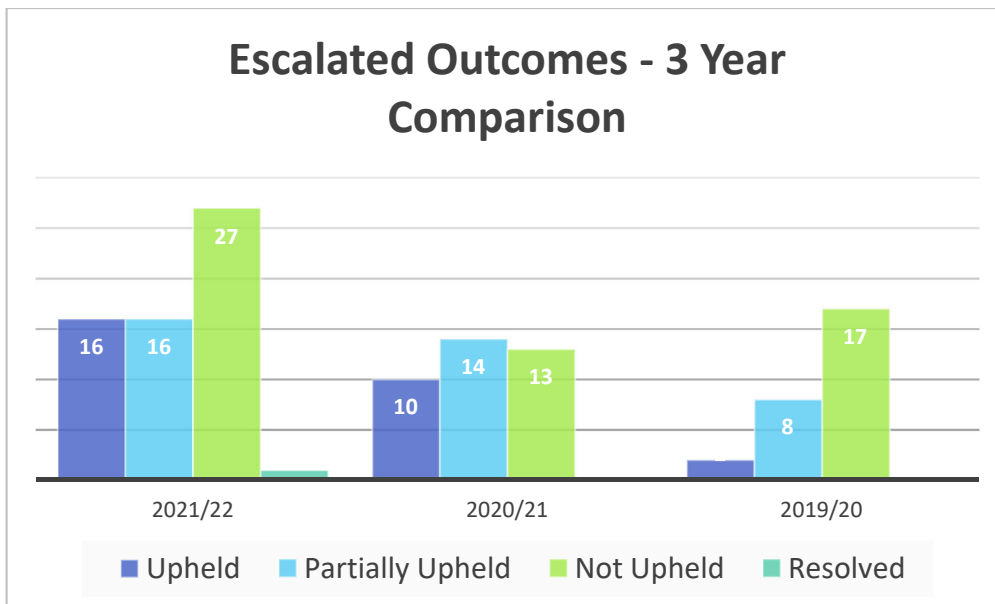
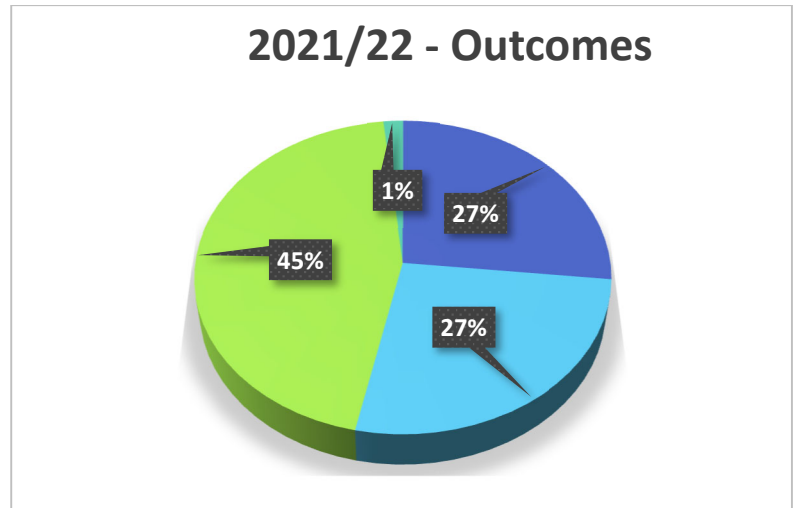
When a customer is not happy with a Stage 1 response, it is dealt with as a Stage 2 complaint — these are known as “Escalated Complaints”.

16 complaints were Upheld after escalation - 27%

16 complaints were Partially Upheld after escalation – 27%

27 complaints were Not Upheld after escalation – 45%

1 complaint was Resolved after escalation – 2%



\*Resolved outcome only relevant to 2021/22 data

## Indicator 4 – Average Times

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2021/2022, we closed **489** complaints at Stage 1, with a total sum of **1,999 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was **4.1 working days**.

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

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2021/22	489	1,999	4.1
2020/21	303	1491	4.9
2019/20	299	2214	7.4

**Stage 2** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2021/2022, we closed **141** complaints at Stage 2, with a total sum of **3,107 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was **22 working days**.

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

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2021/22	141	3,107	22
2020/21	67	1289	19.2
2019/20	47	1002	21.3

Monthly performance reporting is provided to all Heads of Service, Directors and Complaints Officers to allow them to take action with their Services if required.

### Indicator 4 – Average Times

**After Escalation** – in 2021/2022, we closed **60** escalated complaints after Escalation, with a total sum of **954 working days**. Our average time to close a complaint after Escalation was **15.9 working days**.

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

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2021/22	60	954	15.9
2020/21	37	604	16.3
2019/20	27	400	15.4



## Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2021/2022, we closed **489** complaints at Stage 1 with **411** of these within timescale, or **84%**. **11 (2%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2021/22	489	411	84%	11	2%
2020/21	303	232	77%	8	3%
2019/20	299	206	68.9%	8	2.7%

**Stage 2** – we aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2021/2022, we closed **141** complaints at Stage 2, with **93** of these within timescale, or **66%**. **35 (25%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2021/22	141	93	66%	35	25%
2020/21	67	46	69%	11	16%
2019/20	47	26	55.3%	10	21.3%

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

## Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**After Escalation** – in 2021/2022, we closed **60** complaints after Escalation, with **48** of these within timescale, or **80%**. **8 (13%)** were closed after an extension was agree with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2021/22	60	48	80%	8	13%
2020/21	37	23	62%	3	8%
2019/20	27	20	74.1%	2	7.4%



## 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

11 Extensions agreed

2% of total complaints

### Stage 2

35 extensions agreed

25% of total complaints

### Escalated complaints

8 extensions agreed

13% 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 72 responses to our survey during the year, which is just over 10% 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.

**67%** of customers who responded to the survey indicated that they felt their complaint had been dealt with fairly.

**53%** 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. Occasionally we see a more significant change in process following receipt of a complaint, and one example of this is shown below:

Customer wanted to make a complaint about waste that was being left behind by carers visiting a neighbour. Resolved – Contact made with the provider of Home care services who visited the site immediately in preparation of cleaning up if needed. The site was clear as bins had been emptied this morning. Care staff attending have been reminded to be more vigilant in ensuring the tied waste bags are secured within the actual bin as being exposed by an open bin lid is leading to high winds blowing the waste bags into neighbouring properties. Contact by phone was made to the complainant who was happy with the action taken. The main issue we are experiencing in Home Care is the change to waste bins being emptied every 3 weeks. Although some of our clients have been issued with 2 bins this is not sufficient and leads of overflow. Clients in receipt of high levels of home care such as 4/5 visits per day by two carers generates a lot of PPE and clinical waste and often the capacity of 2 bins is not sufficient. Contact was made with colleagues in Amenity Services to discuss waste options and larger capacity bins are now being discussed for clients receiving home care services.

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 2021/2022

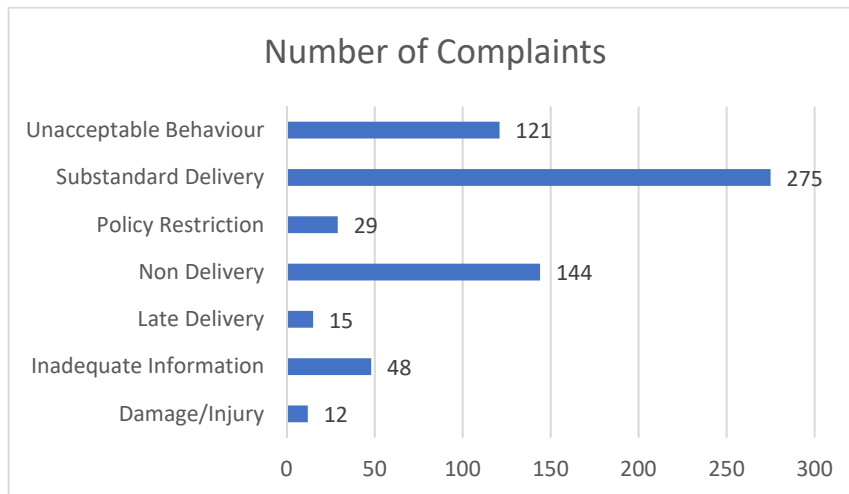
23 cases were received by the SPSO in relation to Argyll and Bute Council in 2021/2022. Of these, 4 were not progressed as they were either: premature (the complaint had not been taken through the Council's process first); withdrawn; or were outwith the SPSO's jurisdiction. 16 cases were resolved early—when 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. 3 complaints were investigated by the SPSO, 2 of which were fully upheld and 1 was partially upheld.

The SPSO publishes reports about all the organisations it has involvement with. More information is available from [Statistics 2021-22 | SPSO](#)



## Complaint Themes

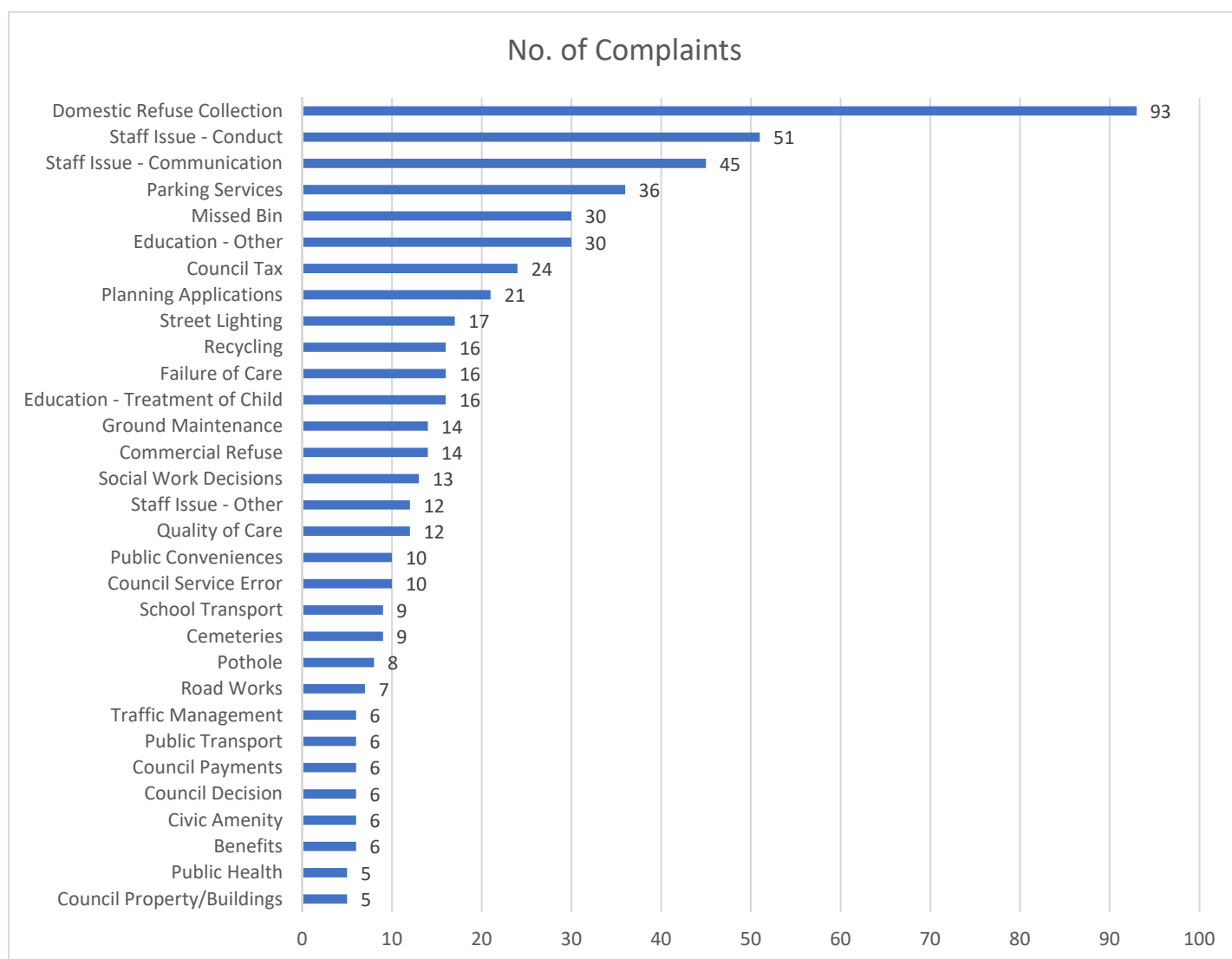
We record information about what type of complaints we receive, and have a standard set of categories that complaints generally fall into. The chart below shows how the complaints received have been classified during 2021-22.



*\*Note – the total here does not directly correspond with the total number of complaints, due to how escalated complaint categories are recorded*



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.



## Positive Feedback

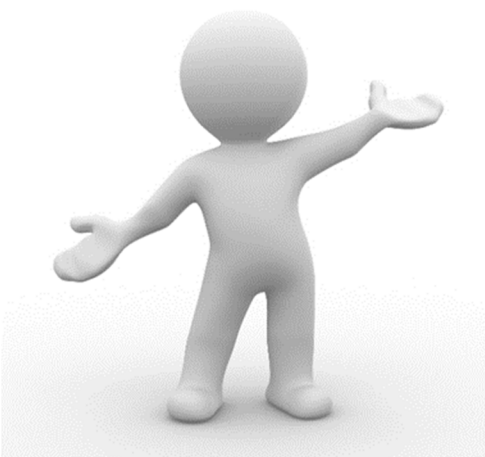
I've been extremely pleased with the service I received from all of the council people I've had to speak to regarding applications for various things and queries I've had. Everything has been dealt with very efficiently, very professionally and in a really courteous, excellent manner and my grateful thanks.

The person who helped me get my bin sorted and like understand my Council Tax was just wonderful and made what I was kind of dreading calling the council such a wonderful experience and so you have a real gem on your hands

Everybody that I speak to at Argyll & Bute Council are so so helpful and can't do enough for you. Thank you

I was delighted with the service, very professional, very polite, very informative, couldn't fault them, very good.

We had such a wonderful day and our wedding service was absolutely perfect. From the moment we first enquired, the staff at the registry office were professional, helpful and caring. They made the process so very easy and we would not hesitate to recommend getting married on the Isle of Mull to everyone. Thank you to the team at Tobermory!



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.

I was greeted by staff at the front desk and pointed to the counter were I needed to go. The staff were friendly and helpful and I didn't have to wait about

I've just recently moved into Helensburgh and now deal with Argyll & Bute Council. I would just like to say how absolutely wonderful the service has been on any occasion I've had to speak to your staff and a big thanks to the lady today who couldn't be more helpful and I very much appreciate it. Thanks

Islay and Argyll & Bute Registrars have to be the most informative helpful and polite service around. 10 out of 10

I'm highly delighted with your caller, she was very kind, very professional, very compassionate and kind and I can only say that good lady and her colleagues should be getting double money. God bless you, thank you,

Really swift and efficient and friendly service from your team, knowledgeable about what was going on so really appreciated that. Made the call nice and easy and easy to action with what happens, sending out a form so really helpful, really happy thank you.





## Contact Us

Thank you for looking at our annual complaints report for 2021-22. 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](mailto:enquiries@argyll-bute.gov.uk)

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

