



# ANNUAL COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25

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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 2024 and 31 March 2025.

In July 2024, we successfully implemented the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's Child Friendly Complaints Procedure following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) being incorporated into Scottish Law. Through this procedure, we can ensure that Children's rights and needs are central to policy and decision making and ensure they are the primary decision makers on complaints (where they have the capacity to do so).

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing high quality services for residents, businesses and visitors in our area and an important part of this commitment is to ensure we have effective processes in place to resolve matters when things go wrong.

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 but we welcome and value complaints and feedback from our customers as it allows us to learn from the issues reported to us to improve the quality of the services we provide.

Some examples of those improvements made are included within this report.

It has been a challenging year and 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.



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



# 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 2024 and 31 March 2025. 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 2024/2025 Argyll and Bute received, processed and closed  
**830**  
complaints.

The population of Argyll and Bute is estimated at around  
**86,220**



This means there were **9.6** complaints per **1,000 population**, or roughly **1** resident in **104** 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
2024/25	830	9.6
2023/24	781	9.1
2022/23	686	8.0

## INDICATOR 2 – NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS

This indicator provides information about the number of complaints received 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).

566\* complaints were closed at Stage 1 – 70%

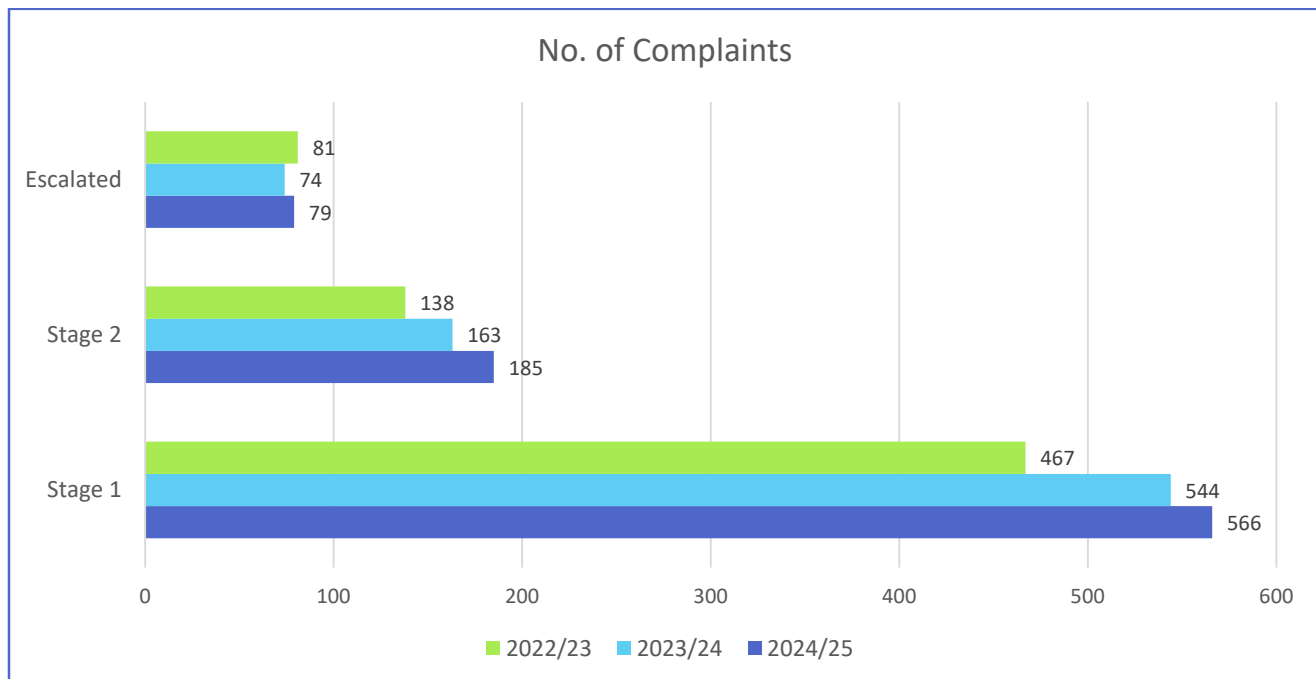
184\* complaints were closed at Stage 2 – 21%

80 complaints were closed after escalation – 9%

\*7 complaints were not closed at Stage 1 within 10 days and were escalated to Stage 2.

\*1 Complex Complaint at Stage 2 has not been closed at time of reporting due to an extension being applied.

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

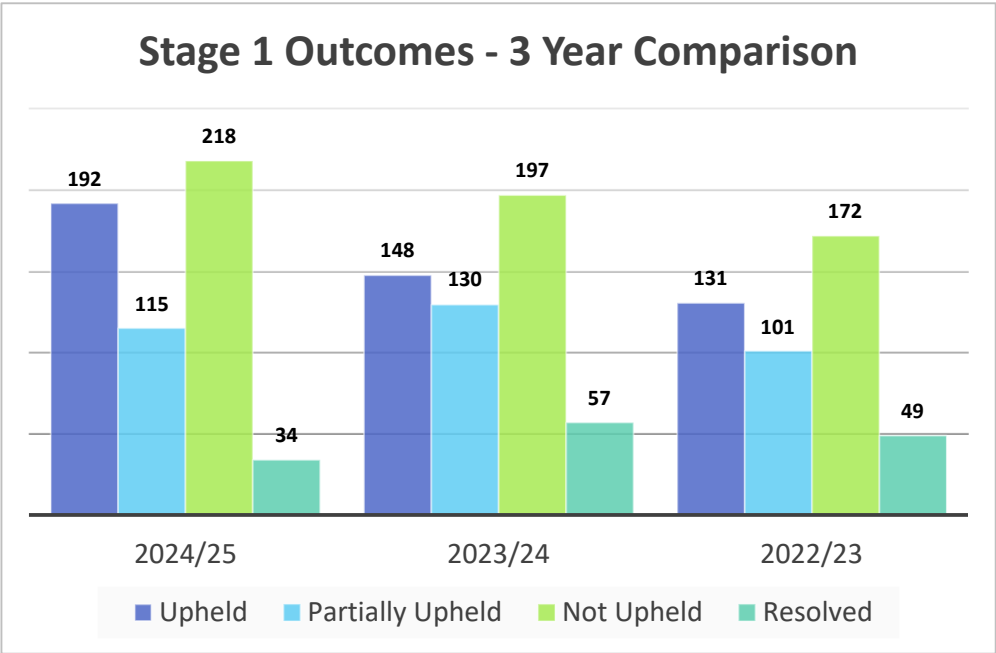
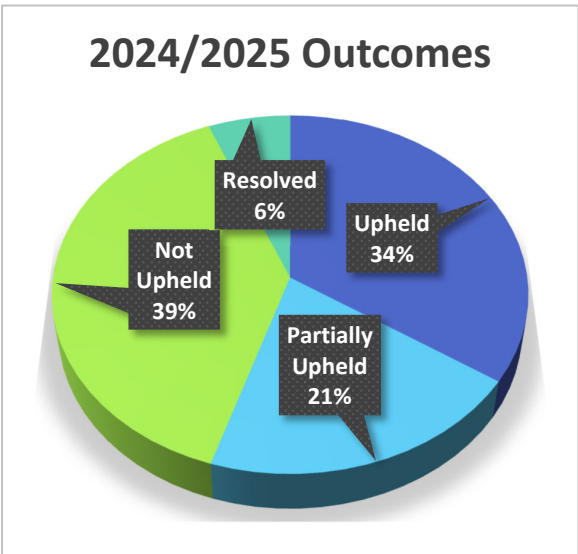
With every complaint, we contact the customer and explain what the outcome of their complaint was — Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld — and provide details about how this decision was made. The charts below provide a comparison of the outcomes for this year, and over the past 3 years. The “resolved”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

192 complaints were Upheld at Stage 1 – 34%

115 complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 1 – 21%

218 complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 1 – 39%

34 complaints were Resolved at Stage 1 – 6%



## INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES STAGE 2

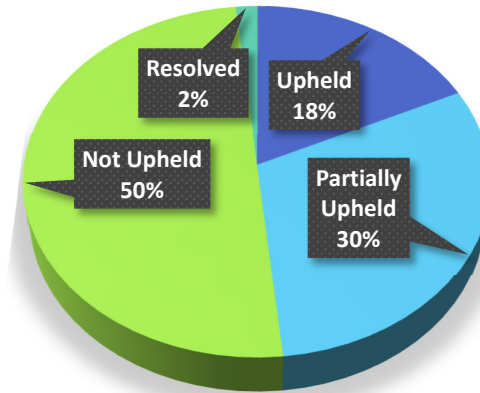
33 Complaints were Upheld at Stage 2 – 18%

56 Complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 2 – 30%

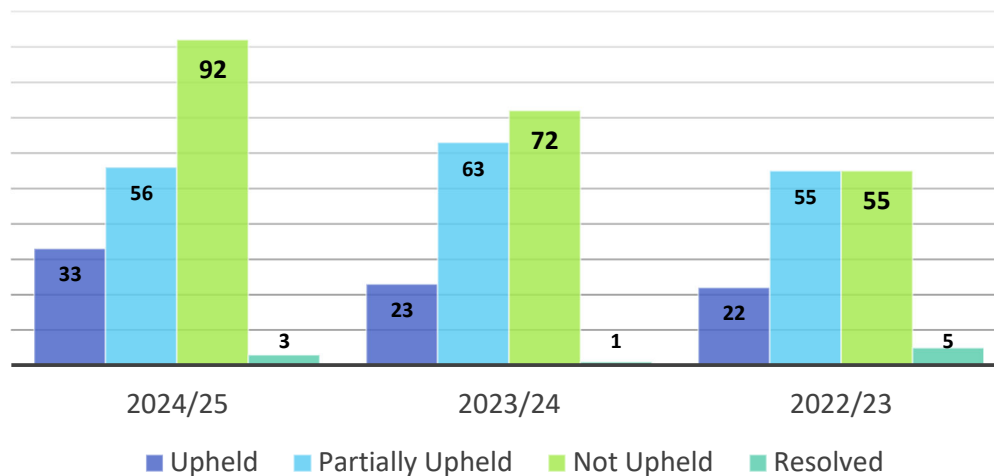
92 Complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 2 – 50%

3 Complaints were Resolved at Stage 2 – 2%

2024/2025 Outcomes



Stage 2 Outcomes - 3 Year Comparison



INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

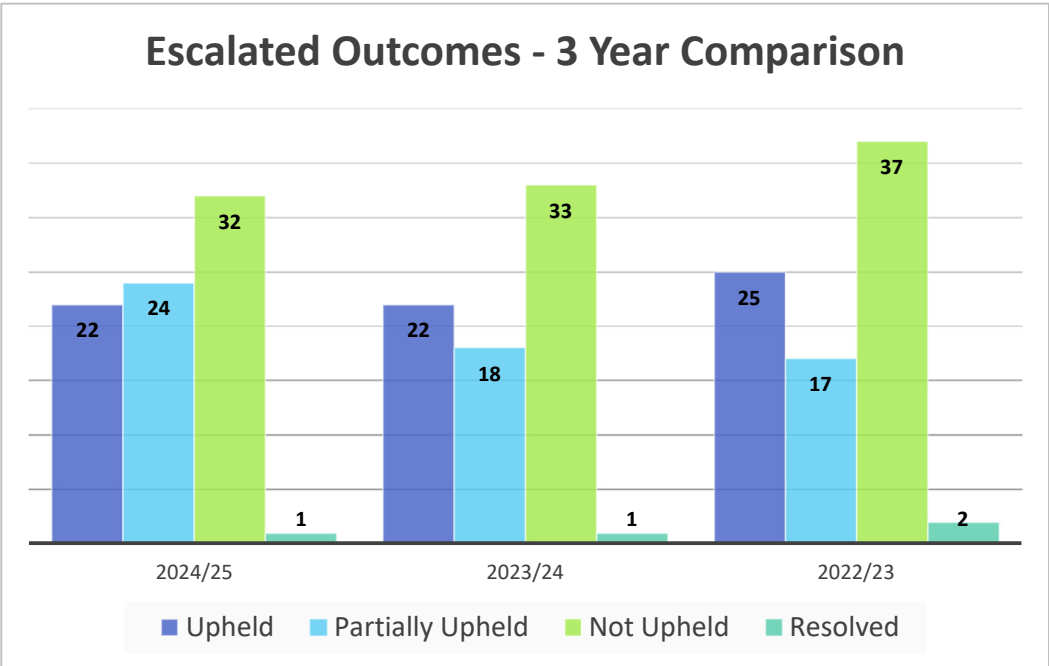
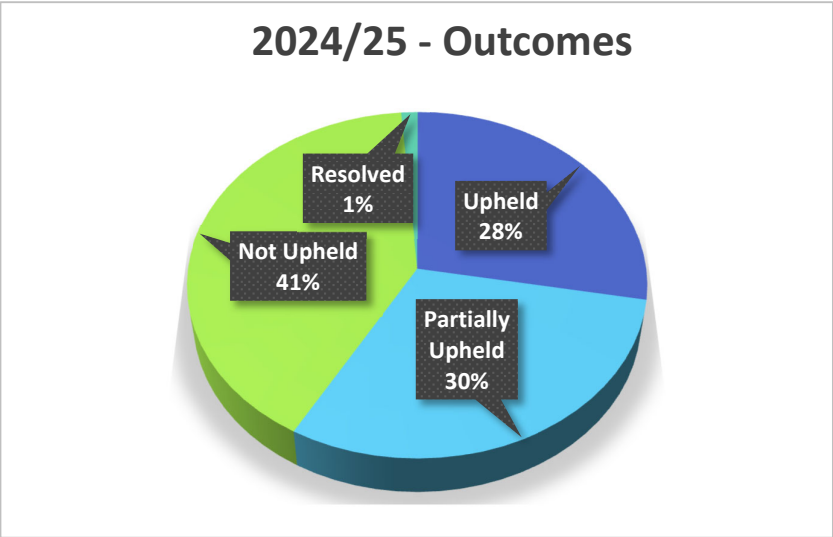
When a customer is not happy with a Stage 1 response, it is dealt with as a Stage 2 complaint — these are known as “Escalated Complaints”.

22 complaints were Upheld after escalation - 28%

24 complaints were Partially Upheld after escalation – 30%

32 complaints were Not Upheld after escalation – 41%

1 complaint was Resolved after escalation – 1%





## INDICATOR 4 – AVERAGE TIMES

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2024/2025, we closed **559** complaints at Stage 1, with a total sum of **2,505 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was **4.5 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)
2024/25	559	2505	4.5
2023/24	532	2337	4.4
2022/23	453	1,995	4.4

**Stage 2** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2024/2025, we closed **184** complaints at Stage 2, with a total sum of **4,087 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was **22.2 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)
2024/25	184	4,087	22.2
2023/24	159	3,587	22.6
2022/23	137	2367	17.3

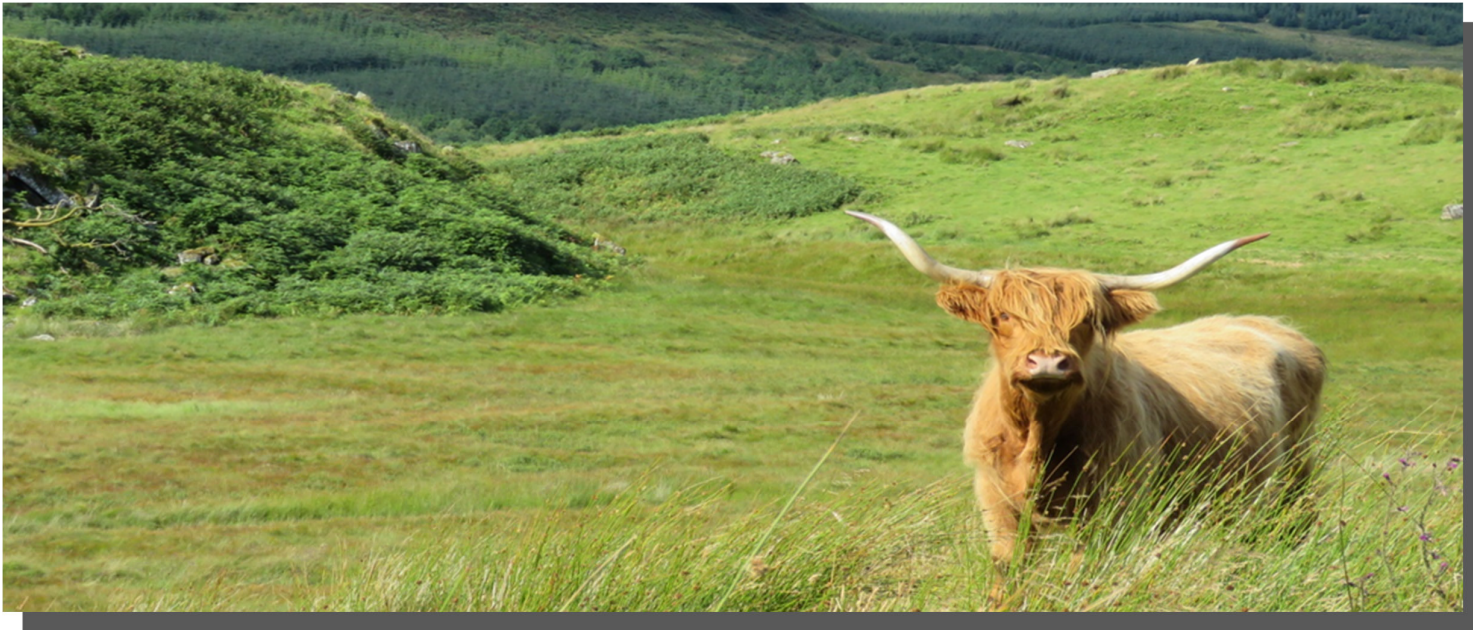
Monthly performance reporting is provided to all Heads of Service, Directors and Complaints Officers to allow them to take action with their Services if required.

Indicator 4 – Average Times

**After Escalation** – in 2024/2025, we closed **79** escalated complaints after Escalation, with a total sum of **1,607 working days**. Our average time to close a complaint after Escalation was **20.3 working days**.

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

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2024/25	79	1,607	20.3
2023/24	74	1,643	22.2
2022/23	81	1671	20.6



## INDICATOR 5 – PERFORMANCE AGAINST TIMESCALES

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2024/2025, we closed **559** complaints at Stage 1 with **465** of these within timescale, or **83%**. **35 (6%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2024/25	559	465	83%	35	6%
2023/24	532	442	83%	37	7%
2022/23	453	370	82%	23	5%

**Stage 2** – we aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2024/2025, we closed **184** complaints at Stage 2, with **110** of these within timescale, or **60%**. **38 (21%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2024/25	184	110	60%	38	21%
2023/24	159	100	63%	38	24%
2022/23	137	65	47%	33	24%

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



Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**After Escalation** – in 2024/2025, we closed **79** complaints after Escalation, with **54** of these within timescale, or **68%**. **12 (15%)** were closed after an extension was agree with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2024/25	79	54	68%	12	15%
2023/24	74	44	59%	12	16%
2022/23	81	46	57%	23	28%



## 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

35 Extensions agreed

6% of total complaints

### Stage 2

38 extensions agreed

21% of total complaints

### Escalated complaints

12 extensions agreed

15% 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 91 responses to our survey during the year, which is just over 13% 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.

**75%** of customers indicated that they found it easy to make a complaint

**68%** of customers indicated they were told if the response was going to take longer than the set timescales

**77%** of customers indicated that information about the complaints procedure was easily accessible.

**64%** of customers indicated that they were given the opportunity to fully explain their complaint.

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 publishing our annual report.

### **How we report Complaints Performance and Trends to our Customers**

We publish the quarterly and annual reports on our website: [Complaints | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/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. Examples of some of these changes are shown below:

Customer wanted to make a complaint about the lack of response received following an email being sent to a member of staff. Complaint Partially Upheld – Customer was advised that unfortunately the member of staff that had been emailed was unexpectedly absent from work. It was identified that a process was required to be implemented, whereby should a member of staff be absent unexpectedly, arrangements should be made by the manager with IT colleagues to ensure either an Out of office message with alternate contact details is placed on the account or the Manager is granted access to access the absent staff members mailbox. This will ensure that any correspondence can be redirected as appropriate.

Customer complaint in relation to the use of acronyms in reports that were available for the public and the lack of glossary included. Complaint Fully Upheld – While it is common practise when writing reports that the relevant term is used in full when first referenced with the acronym defined before it is then used within the remainder of the report, it was acknowledged that this does not always happen. It was identified that there was no specific reference to the use of acronyms within report guidance. The guidance was updated and issued to Officers involved in report writing to ensure this does not reoccur.

Customer wanted to make a complaint about being unable to report a Missed Bin on the website. Complaint Resolved – It was identified that the issue stemmed from the Home Telephone Number being a mandatory field within the Webform and the customer not having one. The Webform was updated to remove the requirement for this information and the customer was advised that this had been updated. This will ensure that no other customers are faced with the same problem.

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 2024/2025

27 cases were received by the SPSO in relation to Argyll and Bute Council in 2024/2025.

**8** – Advice (not progressed) - 1 was mature (complaint was out with the time period for raising the complaint), 5 were premature (complainant contacted the SPSO before progressing through full complaints process) and 4 were enquiries.

**27** - resolved early (not investigated) — the SPSO asks the Council to provide information in connection with the complaint, from that the investigating officer decides whether the complaint should be pursued further. Some of the reasons provided for not proceeding to an investigation were “Good Complaint Handling” and “Insufficient benefit would be achieved”.

**0** – Investigations by the SPSO, however, there was **1** investigation in which we received an outcome of Fully Upheld from a 2023/24 Complaint.

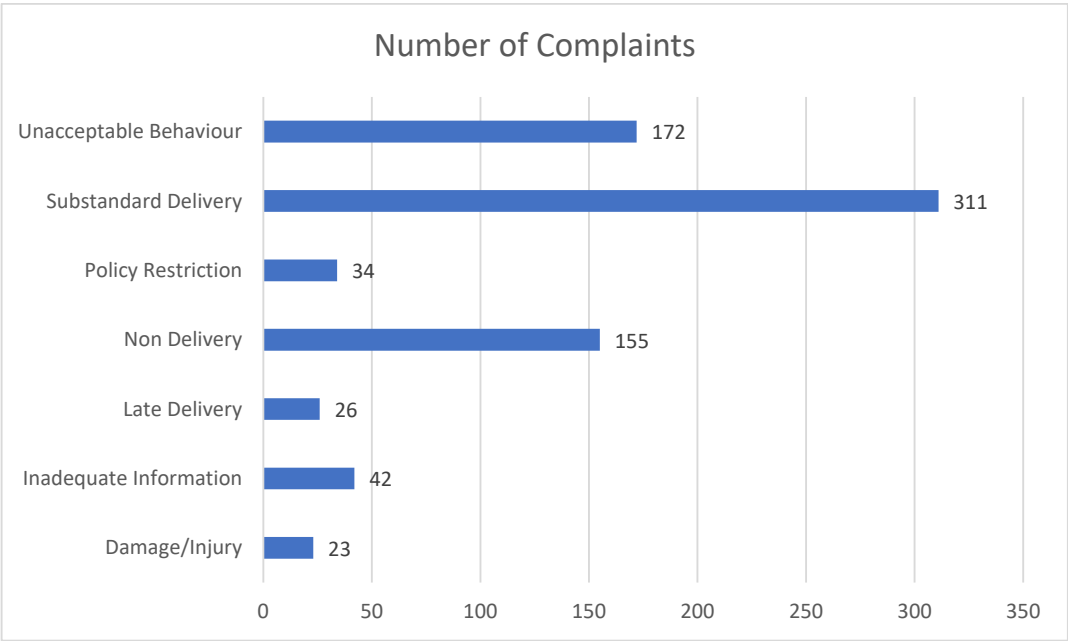
The SPSO publishes reports about all the organisations it has involvement with. More information is available from [Statistics 2024-25 | SPSO](#)





# COMPLAINT THEMES

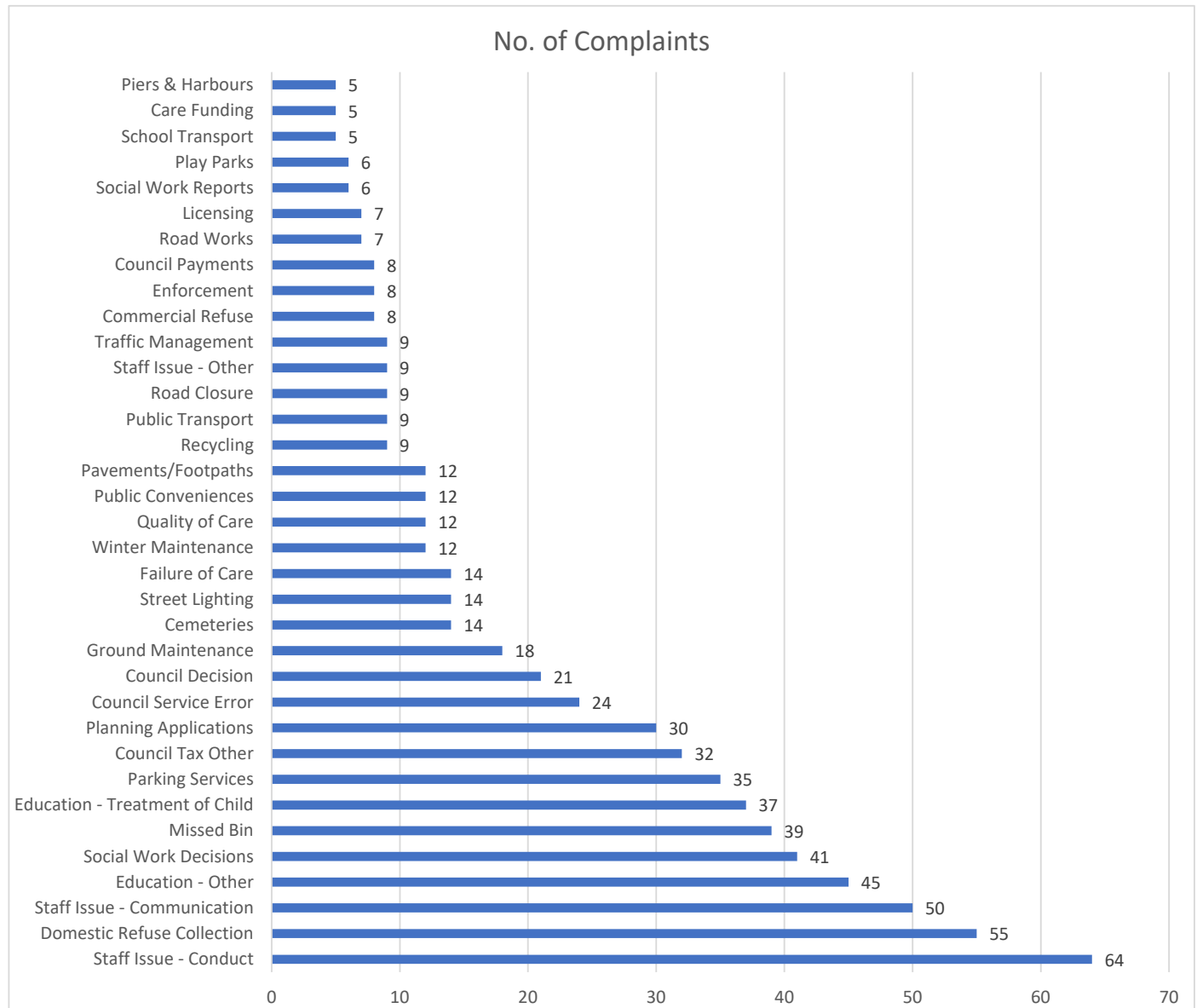
We record information about what type of complaints we receive, and have a standard set of categories that complaints generally fall into. The chart below shows how the complaints received have been classified during 2024-25.



*\*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

Service was fantastic all dealt with in one phone call. Were very professional. A lot of councils in the UK generally should take heed of the quality of service received today and a credit to the ladies, that's all I've got to say.

Here is a short message to compliment the awesome professional conduct of the team - [1] was patient and understanding, took time to listen, [2] immediately understood the situation and grasped the bigger picture [3] was genuinely considerate and showed knowledge and expertise, [4] relieved my anxiety and stress. please commend team.

The person I dealt with was very professional very kind and helped me very much with my Council Tax query today and I'm very grateful for the assistance and you're very lucky to have such nice people working for you. All the best for 2025 many thanks bye now. Fabulous.

The lady I spoke to was extremely helpful which at this moment in time at the age we are it was very rewarding to get this help. We are in our eighties and I got the help I needed the girl was absolutely fantastic. Thank you

For all the years I have dealt with Local Authorities, I have never received such excellent customer service and felt compelled to send you an email. I contacted Building Control to resolve an outstanding issue with a house we were about to purchase. The positive attitude, engagement and problem solving were second to none in helping us resolve a complex building warrant issue. Please kindly pass on my recommendation and appreciation! We are delighted to be moving to such a "welcoming" local authority!



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.

The young lady the employee of yours in the bin collections department was very caring, kind, respectful and gave me wonderful care and service she should be getting 11 out of 10 for customer care. Many thanks for all your help dear 11 out of 10 for customer care, wonderful. Thank you very much.

The person I dealt with was very professional very kind and helped me very much with my Council Tax query today and I'm very grateful for the assistance and you're very lucky to have such nice people working for you. All the best for 2025 many thanks. Fabulous.

Just a quick email to pass on our sincere gratitude with all your help these past few days. You have gone above and beyond and we can't thank you enough.

A wee note of thanks for attending to all of the local government departments following the death of my wife. Your kind attention to this removed a great deal of stress from my shoulders at a time of loss. Thanks again.

I spoke with the lady and she was really, really kind I get really worried when letters come in and I can't do things online I can't manage it and she explained everything very quietly and patiently and kindly so that's put my mind at ease and I'm very grateful to her so she's very good employee so thank you very much.

The representative that I spoke with today was absolutely 100% helpful, professional, a really, really, nice person to deal with and I wouldn't hesitate to call her back again if I had any queries as such a nice person. A credit to Argyll & Bute Council. Thank you.



## CONTACT US

Thank you for looking at our annual complaints report for 2024-25. If you would like to know more about our complaints procedure, details can be found on our website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-council/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 - <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-council/how-contact-us>

