

Annual Complaints Performance Report 2023/24

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Our customer comments and complaints procedure

Listening to You

We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about our action, or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us, or on our behalf.

We take all complaints seriously. Our staff are trained in handling complaints effectively by focusing where possible on resolution at the first point of contact.

Our complaints procedure 'Listening to you' has two stages:

Stage 1

We will always try to resolve complaints quickly, within five working days.

Stage 2

If customers are dissatisfied with our response at Stage One, they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two. We will also look at some complaints immediately at this stage if it is clear they are complex or need detailed investigation. We will acknowledge all Stage Two complaints within three working days and provide a response to customers within 20 working days, unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time to investigate.

Where customers are dissatisfied with our decision regarding a Stage Two complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider their complaint further.

Our Performance – Key Figures

The following sections of this report provide performance information which is based on indicators outlined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

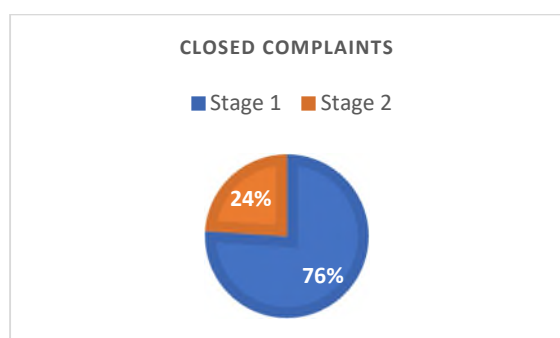
Indicator 1 – The total number of complaints received

This section details the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 (including escalated complaints as they were first received at Stage 1), and the number of complaints received directly at Stage 2. In 2023/24 South Ayrshire Council handled **650** complaints from customers

-In 2022/23, the Council closed 456, showing an increase of 42%

- **494** complaints were closed at Stage One. This represents **76%** of all complaints closed.
- **110** complaints were closed at Stage Two. This represents **17%** of all complaints closed.
- Of the **494** Stage One complaints, **46** were escalated to Stage Two, showing that only **7%** of our customers were dissatisfied with their Stage One outcome.

Complaints closed at Stage One and Stage Two:



-76% of complaints received in 2023/24 were closed at Stage One compared to 84% in 2022/23 representing an annual decrease of 7%

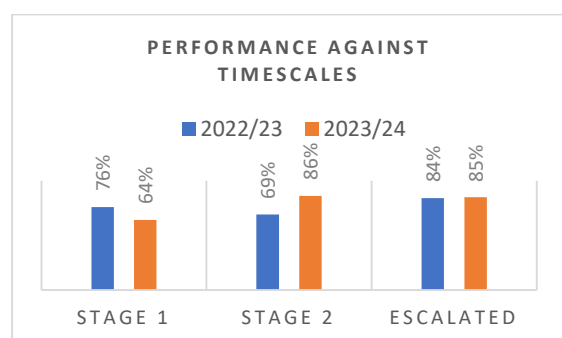
-24% of all complaints received in 2023/24 were closed at Stage Two, compared to 16% in 2022/23 representing an annual increase of 8%

Indicator 2 – The number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days

This section details the number of complaints closed in full at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation within complaint timescales as % of all stage 1, stage 2 and escalated complaints responded to in full. These include cases where an extension to the timescale has been agreed with the complainant.

- **316** complaints were closed at Stage One within **5** working days, representing **64%** of all Stage One complaints
- **94** complaints were closed at Stage Two within **20** working days, representing **86%** of all Stage Two complaints
- **39** escalated complaints were closed within **20** working days, representing **85%** of all complaints that were escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

Timescales Met: year-by-year comparison



Indicator 3 – The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage

This section details the average (mean) time in working days to respond at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation.

Stage One complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage One complaints within **5** working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage One was **6** working days

Stage Two complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage Two complaints within **20** working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage Two was **16** working days

Complaints Escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

- The average time to respond to escalated complaints was **13** working days

-In 2023/24 we responded on average to a Stage One complaint within 6 working days, which is outwith the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) statutory timescale of 5 working days.

- In 2023/24 we responded to Stage 2 complaints on average within 16 working days. This is an improvement of 4 working days and is within SPSO statutory timescales.

- In 2023/24 – we responded on average to escalated complaints within 13 working days. This is an improvement of 3 working days and is within SPSO statutory timescales

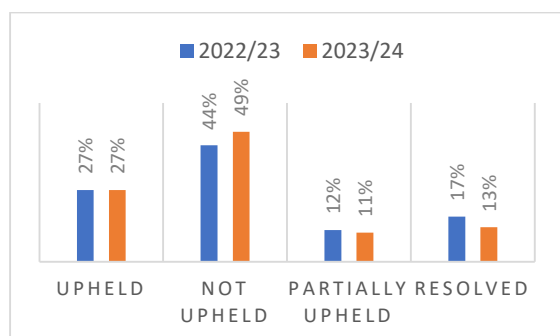
Indicator 4 – The outcome of complaints at each stage

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld, not upheld and resolved at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation as % of all complaints closed at stage 1, stage 2 and after escalation.

Outcome of Stage One Complaints

- **135** complaints were upheld at Stage One (**27 %**)
- **242** complaints were not upheld at Stage One (**49%**)
- **53** complaints were partially upheld at Stage One (**11 %**)
- **64** complaints were resolved at Stage One (**13 %**)

Stage 1 Outcomes: year-by-year comparison

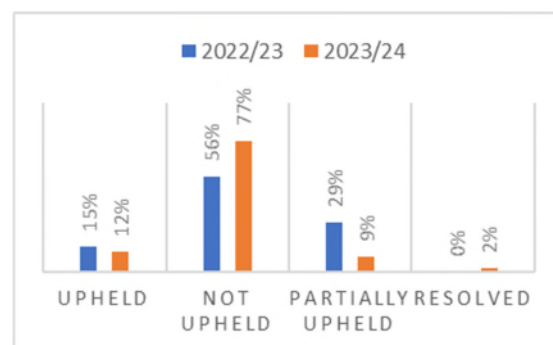


- **38 %** of Stage One complaints in 2023/24 were either upheld or partially upheld, compared to **39 %** in 2022/23, a decrease of 1%.

Outcome of Stage Two complaints

- **13** complaints were upheld at Stage Two (**12 %**)
- **85** complaints were not upheld at Stage Two (**77 %**)
- **10** complaints were partially upheld at Stage Two (**9 %**)
- **2** complaints were resolved at Stage Two (**2 %**)

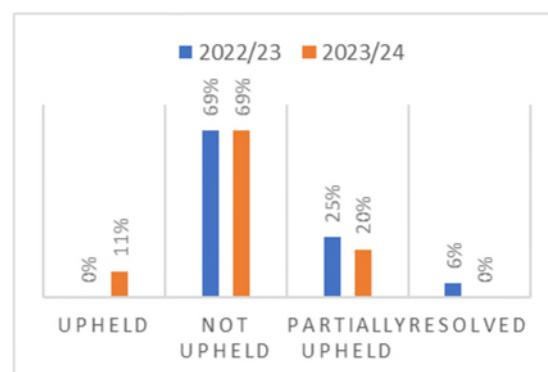
Stage 2 Outcomes: year-by-year comparison



Outcome of complaints escalated from Stage One to Stage Two

- **5** complaints were upheld (**11 %**)
- **32** complaints were not upheld (**69 %**)
- **9** complaints were partially upheld (**20%**)
- **0** complaints were resolved (**0 %**)

Escalated Outcomes: year-by-year comparison



Additional Information - Non-Mandatory Reporting Indicators

The following sections of this report provide additional information which is gathered in addition to the key performance indicators required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Complaints Received Per 1,000 of Population

This section details the total number of complaints handled by South Ayrshire Council in the reporting period 2023/24. To allow for a fair comparison across all 32 Scottish Councils the figure of complaints per 1,000 of population is used.

- The population of South Ayrshire is estimated at **112,470**
- In 2023/24 South Ayrshire Council handled **754** complaints from customers
- Meaning that an average of **7** complaints were received per **1,000** residents

-In 2022/23, the Council received 4 complaints per 1,000 South Ayrshire residents, showing that complaints per 1,000 population has increased between reporting periods.

Number of Cases where an Extension is authorised

We always aim to respond to complaints as quickly as possible. However there are times when a complaint is particularly complex and it is not feasible to fully investigate the issues within the prescribed timescales.

In these situations we can agree with a complainant to extend the timescales for closing the complaint. This indicator outlines the number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension to the **5** or **20** working day timescale was authorised:

103 complaints closed at Stage One were granted an extension, representing **21%** of all Stage One complaints. Taking into account extensions **85%** of Stage One complaints met required timescales

11 complaints closed at Stage Two were granted an extension, representing **10%** of all Stage Two complaints. Taking into account extensions **96%** of Stage Two complaints met required timescales

5 complaints closed at the escalation stage were granted an extension, representing **11%** of all Stage Two complaints. Taking into account extensions **96%** of all escalated complaints met required timescales

*-In 2022/23 **77** complaints were subject to an authorised extension, compared to **119** in 2023/24, an increase of **42** cases. This indicates that our complaints investigators will seek extensions where required to ensure a thorough investigation is undertaken.*

Customer Satisfaction

In conjunction with further guidance issued by the SPSO, South Ayrshire Council have recently updated our customer satisfaction survey.

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, 120 requests were issued to members of the public inviting them to participate in our Customer Satisfaction Survey. 30 customer satisfaction surveys were completed which constitutes a 25% return.

	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Information about the complaints procedure was easily accessible	64%	3%	33%
I found it easy to make my complaint	53%	20%	27%
I was happy that the Investigating Officer fully understood my complaint	40%	13%	47%
I was given the opportunity to fully explain my complaint	57%	13%	30%
The points of my complaint were identified and responded to	36%	17%	47%
The response to my complaint was easy to understand	50%	27%	23%
Overall I was satisfied with the handling of my complaint	33%	17%	50%
I was told if the response was going to take longer than the set timescales (<i>five working days at stage 1 and 20 working days at stage 2</i>)	27%	46%	27%
I was clearly told what the next stage of the complaints process was for me	43%	17%	40%

Learning from Complaints

We take all complaints seriously and information gathered from complaints is invaluable in helping us to continuously improve our services. Since the introduction of *Listening to You* we have made changes to our services and procedures as a direct result of complaints we have received. Some examples of these improvements are outlined as case studies in this section.

How we report on complaints performance and trends to senior managers and staff

- We report quarterly to Senior Managers, providing them with complaints performance information and highlighting any issues and complaints trends in their service areas.
- We provide bi-annual reports to our Elected Members. These reports contain complaints performance information and provide analysis of reasons for complaints and complaint trends. Service Managers attend Panels to discuss these reports and complaints trends with Panel Members.
- Council managers use information from these reports to identify and share any learning from complaints and to inform their service planning process.
- We have dedicated web pages which employees can access to obtain information on our *Listening to You* process, complaint trends and

patterns and learning from complaints.

- We actively train complaint coordinators, investigators, officers and administrators in complaints handling procedures and provide email updates and ongoing coaching as required.
- We provide bespoke guidance to Head Teachers and school staff on the implementation of new procedures.
- We train Customer Service advisors and frontline staff on how to handle customer complaints professionally.
- We also use complaints information to coach individual staff and teams, and provide in-house staff training. For example, we use information and learning from complaints as part of our induction procedures for new Customer Services advisors, as well as ongoing Customer Services training, team briefs and individual Performance and Development Reviews.

Since the introduction of *Listening to You* we have made changes to our services and procedures as a direct result of complaints received. Some examples of these improvements are outlined in our case studies section.

Learning from Complaints – Case Studies

One of our key performance indicators is ensuring services are using complaints information to identify areas of improvement. Our Management Teams use complaints information to change and improve their services. The next few pages give a selection of case studies showing how services have used complaints to change the way we do things.

Planning Service

A customer who had raised objections to a planning application subsequently complained that he was not notified that the application had been successful. Following an investigation, it was concluded that, due to an administrative error, the customer did not receive notification of the outcome of the objection.

An investigation concluded that further checks and balances were needed to ensure that the procedures in place within the Planning Service were followed to ensure this situation does not re-occur. The customer was issued with an apology.

Facilities Management Service

A parent complained that her daughter had suffered an allergic

reaction after eating a dish at a primary school in South Ayrshire, which had an altered recipe.

Our investigation determined that due to an issue with our external supplier, the ingredients in the dish had been changed, leading to it containing the allergen egg, which was not part of the original dish.

The parent received a full apology for the situation that arose because of this change. Also, a new Medical Diet Action Plan was put in place for the pupil to ensure this would not reoccur, and to improve communication between Facilities Management and schools, a full review of the Medical Diet Action Plan procedure and processes was carried out in conjunction with all Head Teachers to improve information sharing.

Compliments Received in 2023/24 by our Services

Compliments are recorded by our complaints team to give us an indication of when services are meeting the needs and expectations of our service users. The following are a small sample of the compliments received during 2023/24.

Neighbourhood Services

Our Neighbourhood Services team continues to receive several compliments from members of the public. In particular we received one compliment regarding the Hit Squad in Waste Management, who a member of the public described as, *“...so hardworking and polite when going about tidying up the paths and behind garages in the village”*.

Leisure

We received a number of compliments regarding our Leisure team. One service user wrote following their class at Prestwick Swimming Pool, writing, *“The exercises were constantly varied for those who needed it, feedback and praise given throughout, and just a very high energy and bubbly instructor.”*

Ayr Show - Festival of Flight

We received several compliments following the International Ayr Show Festival of Flight, with one customer in particular contacting us to compliment our staff who they said, *“...made the event easy to access and obviously a lot of effort went into making it run smoothly”*.

Conclusion

The Council remains committed to listening to our customers and using customer feedback to actively change and improve the way we do things. We continue to benchmark our complaints

handling with our Scottish Local Authorities and work with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to ensure best practice continues.

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about our complaints procedure or about our annual report, please contact us.

- Phone: 0300 123 0900
- Email: listeningtoyou@south-ayrshire.gov.uk
- Log on to: [Complaints - South Ayrshire Council \(south-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/complaints)
- Visit: Our Customer Service Centres in Girvan, Maybole, Ayr, Prestwick and Troon
- In writing to:
South Ayrshire Council
Information Governance
Listening to You
County Buildings
Wellington Square
AYR, KA7 1DR