

Annual Complaints
Performance Report
2017/18



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Chief Executive's Introduction

I am pleased to present South Ayrshire Council's fifth annual Complaints Report. This report provides information on customer complaints between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, together with comparison on how we are performing against our previous report of 2016/17.



It is always disappointing to learn where a customer has been unhappy with a Council service, but our 'Listening to You' complaints procedure helps us to capture customer feedback, and through continuous monitoring and listening to your comments we use this

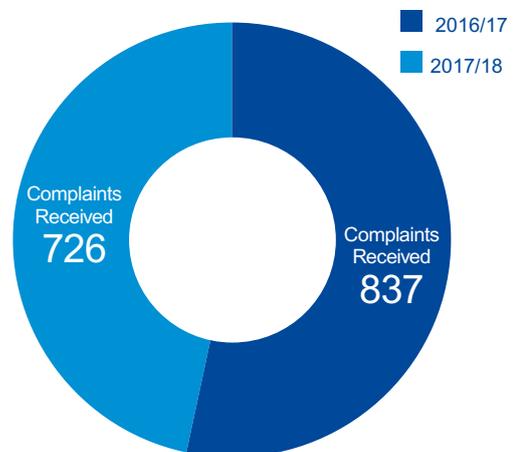
feedback to improve services and train staff. As a Council we recognise the valuable lessons we can continue to learn from your complaints and comments.

In 2017/18 we received **726** complaints from our customers, which is a 13% decrease (111 complaints) compared to 2016/17. The reduction in the number of complaints we are receiving is encouraging as it indicates that since the implementation of Listening to You five years ago our pro-active approach in learning from complaints is having a positive impact on the services we are delivering to people in South Ayrshire, with more of our customers being satisfied with the services we provide.

This positive trend has also been shown this year in the responses we have received to our Customer Satisfaction Survey. Survey respondents have provided us with valuable feedback on our complaints process, letting us know that compared to 2016/17 more of our customers feel their complaint has been understood by the Council; are being treated fairly and with respect; that their complaint response was easy to understand and that the procedure for taking a complaint to the next stage was clear. We encourage all customers who have made a complaint to provide this feedback which takes the form of a very short survey available on our website at: [SAC Complaints Procedure Survey](#).

These improvements are the result of the continued hard work of all Council staff to improve services following a complaint being received, and of the way staff handle complaints. Frontline staff, such

Complaints made to South Ayrshire Council



as Customer Service advisors, are often the first to receive complaints and to ensure they are providing our customers with the help and support needed we use complaints information to form part of their induction programme and for staff training. We also employ complaints co-ordinators, investigators and administrators to ensure all information we need to investigate a complaint is available to make sure we continue to provide complaint responses within designated timescales.

Finally, this year is the second year we have included a "Compliments Received" section in our report, highlighting the compliments given to our services and staff for first-class service. Our Corporate Complaints Team record compliments and provide this greatly appreciated positive feedback to our staff and service areas who are at the heart of the service our customers receive from the Council. It is not possible to provide details of all the compliments we have received this year, but a few examples of positive feedback are given in this year's report.

Eileen Howat
Chief Executive
2018

Our customer comments and complaints procedure



Listening to You

We regard a complaint as any 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

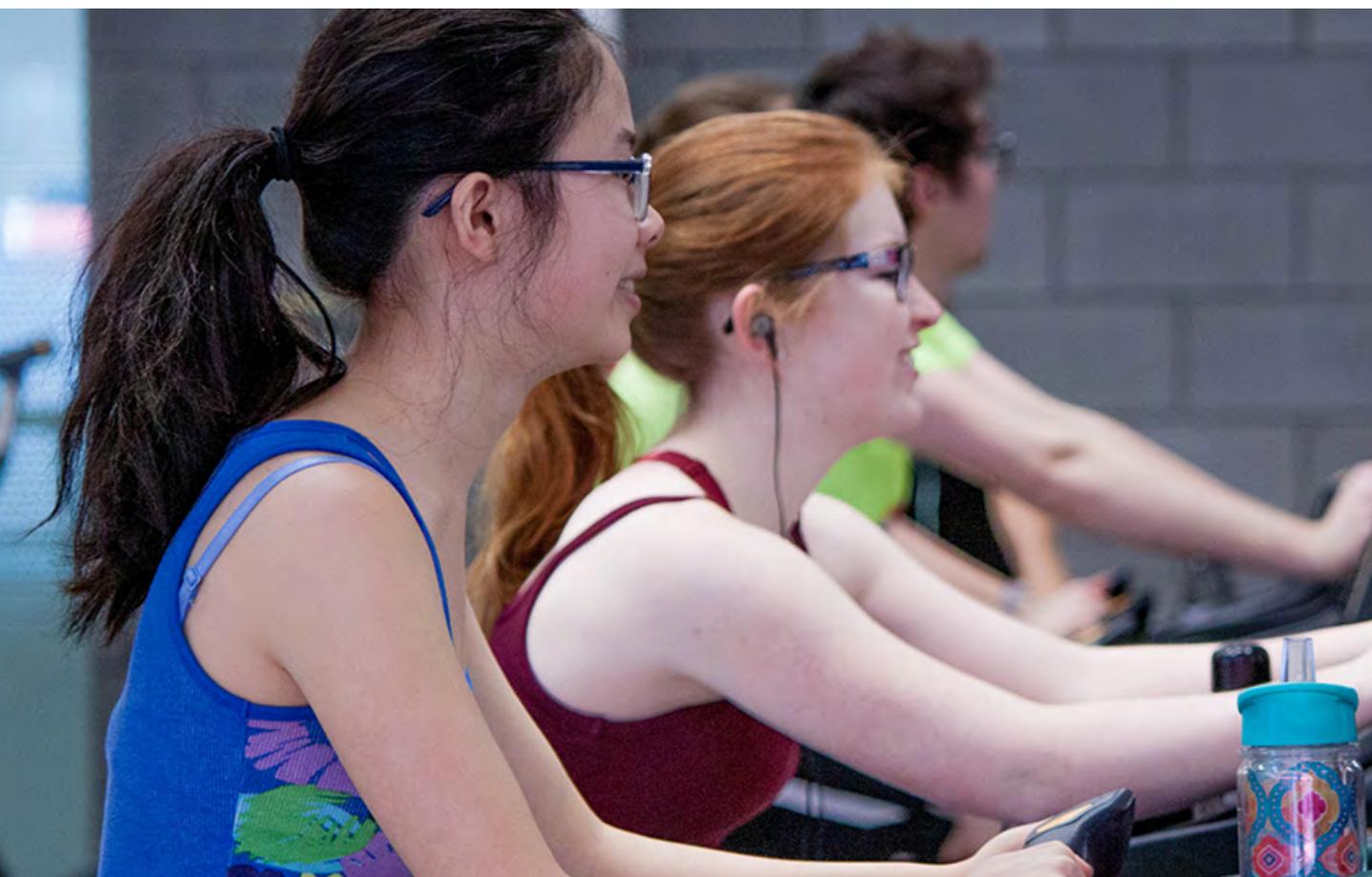
We will always try to resolve complaints quickly, within five working days.

Stage 2

If customers are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1, they can escalate their complaint to Stage 2. 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 2 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 2 complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider their complaint further.

How customers have complained

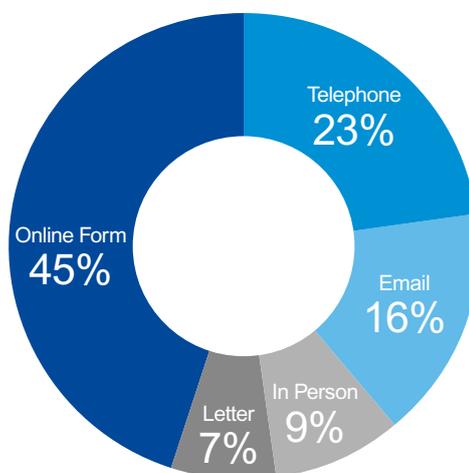


Customers can complain to, or comment about the Council, in a range of ways, including:

- In person, at any of our five centrally located Customer Services Centres in Ayr, Girvan, Maybole, Troon and Prestwick
- In person to any Council employee
- By phone on 0300 123 0900
- By letter
- Online
- By email

In 2017/18 we received **726** complaints from customers who chose the following ways to contact us with a complaint:

Breakdown of the ways people got in touch in 2017/18



- In 2017/18 we received 726 complaints, compared to 837 in 2016/17, a 13% decrease (111 complaints) in the past year.
- This reduction in complaints indicates more customers are satisfied with the services South Ayrshire Council provides.

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 – Complaints Received Per 1,000 of Population

This section details the total number of complaints handled by South Ayrshire Council in the reporting period 2017/18. 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 2017/18 South Ayrshire Council handled **726** complaints from customers
- Meaning that an average of **7** complaints were received per **1,000** residents
- This indicates that **1** in every **155** South Ayrshire residents have registered a complaint about our services

In 2016/17, the Council received 1 complaint in every 137 South Ayrshire residents, compared to 1 in 155 in 2017/18. This shows more South Ayrshire residents are satisfied with our services.

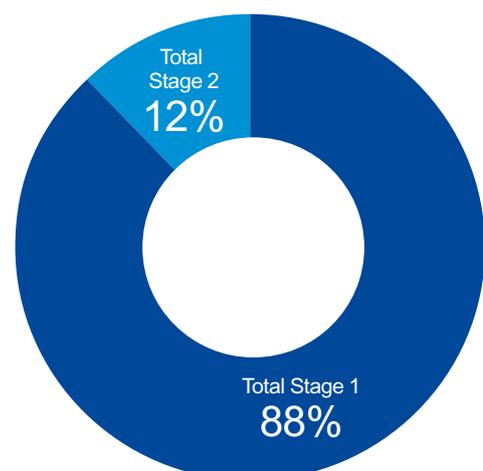
Indicator 2 – Closed Complaints

This indicator provides information on the number of complaints closed at Stage 1 and Stage 2, as a percentage of all complaints closed.

The term “closed” refers to a complaint that has had a response sent to the customer and at the time no further action is required (regardless of which stage it is processed at and whether any further escalation takes place).

- 635 complaints were closed at Stage 1. This represents 88% of all complaints closed.
- 91 complaints were closed at Stage 2. This represents 12% of all complaints closed.
- Of the 91 Stage 2 complaints, 65 were escalated from Stage 1, showing that only 10% of Stage 1 complaints were escalated to Stage 2.

Complaints closed at Stage 1 and Stage 2



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- 88% of complaints received in 2017/18 were closed at Stage One compared to 86% in 2016/17 representing an annual increase of 2%
 - 12% of all complaints received in 2017/18 were closed at Stage Two, compared to 14% in 2016/17 representing an annual decrease of 2%.

Indicator 3 – Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld and Not Upheld

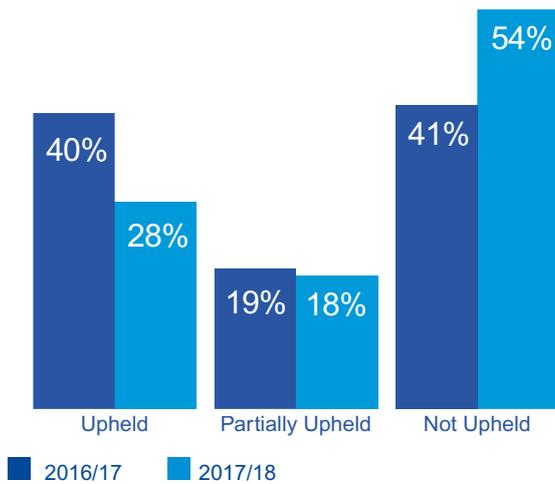
Having considered a complaint, we contact every complainant to explain whether their complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld and why.

This indicator provides information on the number and percentage of complaints which were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld at each stage.

Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints

- 176 complaints were upheld at Stage 1 (28%)
- 113 complaints were partially upheld at Stage 1 (18%)
- 346 complaints were not upheld at Stage 1 (54%)

Complaints made: year-by-year comparison

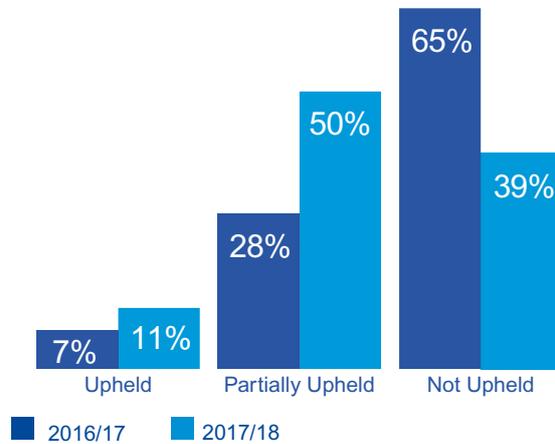


- In 2017/18, 46% of all Stage 1 complaints were either upheld or partially upheld, indicating that almost half of our customers raised genuine concerns with our service provision. This is 13% lower than 2016/17 when 59% of Stage 1 complaints were upheld or partially upheld.
- In 2016/17, 41% of all Stage 1 complaints were not upheld. This number has increased to 54% in 2017/18.

Outcome of Stage 2 complaints

- 3 complaints were upheld at Stage 2 (11%)
- 13 complaints were partially upheld (50%)
- 10 complaints were not upheld (39%)

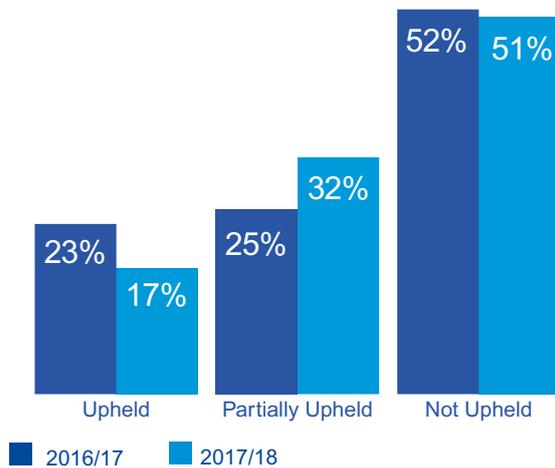
Complaints made: year-by-year comparison



Outcome of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2

- 11 complaints were upheld (17%)
- 21 complaints were partially upheld (32%)
- 33 complaints were not upheld (51%)

Complaints made: year-by-year comparison



- 49% of complaints escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in 2017/18 were either upheld or partially upheld, compared to 48% in 2016/17. This shows a small annual increase of 1%, indicating that we continue to actively listen to our customers' concerns and work towards improving services as a result of customer feedback.



Indicator 4 – Average Times

Stage 1 complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage 1 complaints within **5** working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage 1 was **5** working days

Stage 2 complaints

- We aim to respond to and close Stage 2 complaints within **20** working days
- The average time to respond to complaints at Stage 2 was **26** working days

Complaints Escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2

- The average time to respond to escalated complaints was **19** working days

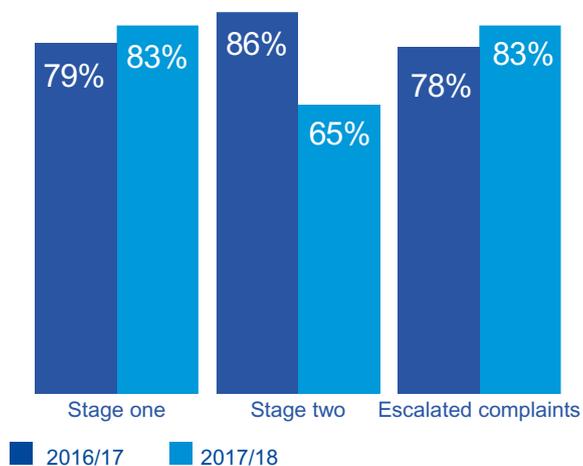
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- In 2017/18, we responded on average to Stage 1 complaints within 5 working days, compared to 6 working days in 2016/17 showing a decrease by one day.
 - 2017/18 – the average time to respond to an escalated complaint was 19 working days, showing an improvement of us taking on average 4 days less to respond compared to 2016/17 when the average time was 23 working days.

Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set time scales of 5 and 20 working days. These include cases where an extension to the timescale has been agreed with the complainant.

- **525** complaints were closed at Stage 1 within **5** working days, representing **83%** of all Stage 1 complaints
- **17** complaints were closed at Stage 2 within **20** working days, representing **65%** of all Stage 2 complaints
- **54** escalated complaints were closed within **20** working days, representing **83%** of all complaints that were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2

Complaints made: year-by-year comparison



- In 2017/18, Stage 1 and Escalated complaints have both improved upon time scales met in comparison to 2016/17, with a 4% increase in Stage 1 and 5% increase in Escalated complaints.
- In 2016/17 86% of Stage 2 complaints were responded to within timescales compared to 65% in 2017/18, a decrease of 21%. However, taking agreed extensions into consideration only 6 Stage 2 complaints were out-with timescales in 2017/18.

Indicator 6 – 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:

- 41** complaints closed at Stage 1 were granted an extension, representing **6%** of all Stage 1 complaints. Taking into account extensions **89%** of Stage 1 complaints met required timescales
- 3** complaints closed at Stage 2 were granted an extension, representing **11%** of all Stage 2 complaints. Taking into account extensions **76%** of Stage 2 complaints met required timescales
- 7** complaints closed at the escalation stage were granted an extension, representing **11%** of all Stage 2 complaints. Taking into account extensions **94%** of all escalated complaints met required timescales

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- In 2016/17, a total of 39 complaints were subject to an authorised extension, compared to 51 in 2017/18, an increase of 12 cases. This indicates the Council is recognising where cases are of a complex nature and is working with complainants to ensure adequate time is agreed to fully investigate and respond to their complaint.



Indicator 7 – Customer Satisfaction

A customer satisfaction survey is available online for complainants who wish to comment on how satisfied they are with our complaints service. The link to this survey is provided to all complainants and is also available on the Council website at: [South Ayrshire Complaints Procedure Survey](#).

Between April 2017 and March 2018 **24%** of complainants engaged and responded to the survey (based on a total of 26 email responses received as at March 2018).

	Strongly Agree/Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
	2016/17	2017/18	2016/17	2017/18
It was easy for me to make a complaint to the Council	81%	80% ▼	19%	20% ▲
My Complaint was understood by the Council	54%	62% ▲	46%	38% ▼
I was treated fairly and with respect by the Council	54%	69% ▲	46%	31% ▼
The response to my complaint was easy to understand	60%	62% ▲	40%	38% ▼
The procedure of taking my complaint to the next stage was clear	60%	73% ▲	40%	27% ▼

The feedback received indicates our customers are receiving an increased positive experience when making a complaint to the Council in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. We will continue to pro-actively seek feedback from complainants to establish where our complaints procedure can be improved further to meet our customers' needs.

Indicator 8 – 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.
 - 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 co-ordinators, 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 managers 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.

Housing Services

Our Housing service was contacted by a customer to complain about the poor standard of the garden at the rear of their property. The tenant had fallen after moving to this property during modernisation works at their permanent tenancy.

The Housing service recognised that improvements could be made to its Housing Inspection procedure for temporary housing properties and as a result an inspection of gardens is now included in the procedure, with any required works identified and carried out prior to a tenant moving in.

Leisure Services

A private reservation had been made to use Maybole Swimming Pool for an afternoon. The group who made the booking were late and staff assumed the session had been cancelled. They covered the pool, which meant it couldn't be used when the party did eventually turn up.

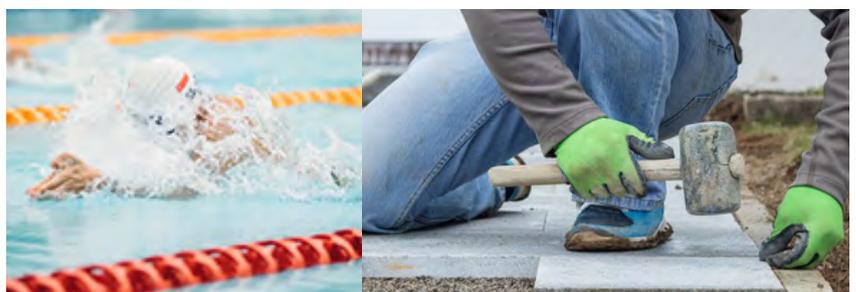
Following a complaint from the group, the Leisure service introduced a new booking form that can be completed by email or over the telephone for anyone wishing to reserve the pool providing clear contact details to both parties to ensure improved communication.

Children and Families

A complaint was received by our Children and Families service relating to the assessment of Kinship Allowance applications and the backdating of allowance and award payments.

It was recognised during the complaint investigation that applicants could be provided with additional clarity and information regarding financial support and the Kinship Allowance application process.

The Children and Families service reviewed and updated their existing Guidance to Applicants to ensure additional clarity is now provided.





Facilities Management

The Council's Facilities Management service received a complaint relating to the enforcement of the Parking Management Strategy at Marr College all weather pitches. The complainant felt the Strategy was not being sufficiently enforced.

Following investigation, further measures were implemented which have included the amendment of letting procedures to introduce increased monitoring and reporting of parking, enhanced communication with groups who let pitches, assessment of signage with a view to improving parking signage in the area and introduction of more stringent consequences if groups fail to adhere to the Parking Strategy.

Following investigation, further measures were implemented which have included the amendment of letting procedures to introduce increased monitoring and reporting of parking, enhanced communication with groups who let pitches.

Compliments Received in 2017/18 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 2017/18.

Information & Advice Hub

One customer let us know how grateful they were for the service they received at our Information & Advice Hub. One of our advisors provided invaluable advice to a customer on how best to complete a PIP application form, complementing the advisor who, *“thought of things to put in the form I wouldn’t have, and I wanted to pass on my thanks.”*

Customer Services

We have received numerous compliments this year relating to our Customer Services Team, with several in particular relating to the welcome desk at our Wallace Tower in Ayr. One customer got in touch to tell us of the positive experience they had when booking a special uplift at the Wallace Tower, *“it made such a massive difference to our visit being greeted by a cheery face at your welcome desk.”*

Community Care

Our Community Care team has one of the highest volumes of compliments received across all Council services in South Ayrshire. Many service users and family members contact us to let us know how invaluable and helpful our Home Carers are.

One service user’s wife wrote took the time to write our Head of Community Health & Care to thank all the carers who had helped her husband, praising their hard work and dedication and advising us that her family, *“didn’t know how they would have gotten through a difficult few weeks,”* without their support.

Property Maintenance

A housing tenant contacted us to compliment one of our Property Maintenance staff following a plumber visiting to carry out repairs. She advised us that the plumber, *“went above and beyond his job to help me,”* not only sorting the problem, but helping to mop her floor, moving items out of the way and ensuring her bathroom was properly cleaned before leaving the premises.

“ ...went above and beyond his job to help me ”





Neighbourhood Services

Our busy re-cycling centre in Troon received praise from one of our customers who discovered they had lost their watch during a visit. After visiting our centre he realised the watch he had put on that morning was no longer on his wrist and as a last resort returned to the re-cycling centre to see if it was lost there. Our customer advised he was barely out of his car when his watch was returned.

"My lost watch was returned to my great delight as it was an anniversary gift from my wife. I was so grateful, the operative couldn't accept a token of my appreciation but I wished to write to pass on my sincere thanks."

Leisure Services

One customer to our Citadel Leisure Centre wrote to us to compliment one of its staff members. In his email the customer acknowledged that he recognised how important it was to provide positive feedback on when the Council gets it right. In this particular case he wished to praise a particular member of staff who *"is an absolute credit to the Citadel Leisure Centre."*

He went on to let us know that our staff member, *"has been thanked countless times by customers, she does a great job and is the hardest working attendant in the area...a credit to the Council. She proves what can be achieved to please customers with minimum spend, and actually gives customers a little moral boost. I really hope you pass on my thanks. She does a fantastic job!"*

Conclusion



In 2017/18 South Ayrshire Council has continued to show areas of improvement in our handling of customer complaints, and in establishing ways to listen to feedback improving our services as a result.

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.

- 0300 123 0900.
- listeningtoyou@south-ayrshire.gov.uk.
- **South Ayrshire Council**
Customer Services
Listening to You
County Buildings,
Wellington Square
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- www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/listeningtoyou.
- Our Customer Service Centres in Girvan, Maybole, Ayr, Prestwick and Troon.