

## **Aberdeen City Council**

### **Annual Complaints Performance Report 2021/22**

#### **Introduction**

It is important that we understand your experience of dealing with Aberdeen City Council and we use the information we have received from complaints to help us improve our services.

By looking at the complaints received, we can try to prevent a problem happening again. The information recorded includes the types of complaint received, how quickly we dealt with each complaint and how many were upheld and not upheld. The information is split into the different complaint stages. We also report how many of our complaints were considered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and their decision.

The SPSO undertook a review of the Complaints Handling Procedure in 2019/20, with the updated procedure implemented from 1 April 2021. The changes included the introduction of a third outcome of “resolved” and a review of the key performance indicators. Further information is available at [www.spsos.org.uk/the-model-complaints-handling-procedures](http://www.spsos.org.uk/the-model-complaints-handling-procedures)

#### **Complaints Handling Procedure**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of the service provided by or on behalf of the council. This includes a failure to follow the proper administrative processes, delays in responding to service requests and enquiries, failure to provide a service to the expected standard, dissatisfaction with Council policies and treatment by or attitude of a member of staff.

All complaints received from customers and service-users are managed under the two stage complaints procedure:

**Stage 1:** This stage is also known as Frontline Resolution as these complaints should be straightforward. A Stage 1 complaint could mean immediate action to resolve the matter. These complaints should be answered in 5 working days. Most complaints should be dealt with at Stage 1

**Stage 2:** This stage is also known as the Investigation stage. A Stage 2 complaint may be a concern that has not been successfully resolved at Stage 1 and therefore escalated or refers to a matter that is complex and requires a full and detailed investigation. Stage 2 complaints should be answered in 20 working days.

A person can make a complaint by using our online form or in person at any council office. To find your local council office, please visit our website: [www.aberdeencity.gov.uk](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk)

## 2021/22 Summary

In 2021/22, Aberdeen City Council received 1,350 complaints overall. A complaint may refer to more than one issue, therefore we categorised each point raised in order to reflect the different concerns. The percentage of complaint points received for each category is shown below.

Category	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Amount of Service Provision</b>	4.2%	14.2%	4.8%
<b>Breach in Confidentiality</b>	0.5%	1.0%	0.8%
<b>Council Policy</b>	4.4%	5.3%	4.9%
<b>Delay in Services</b>	24.7%	16.9%	13.0%
<b>Difficulty in Accessing Services</b>	7.4%	5.8%	5.9%
<b>Discrimination</b>	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
<b>Equalities</b>	0%	0%	0%
<b>Finance / Cost Issues</b>	1.6%	3.3%	1.9%
<b>Non-allocation / access to staff</b>	0%	0%	0.1%
<b>Poor Communication</b>	9.5%	6.1%	9.8%
<b>Quality of Info Provided</b>	4.9%	7.1%	5.6%
<b>Quality of Service</b>	31.7%	26.6%	36.2%
<b>Staff Conduct / Attitude</b>	10.0%	12.25	15.1%
<b>Refusal / Withdrawal of Services</b>	0.7%	1.0%	1.6%
<b>Service Closure</b>	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

We can see that the majority of complaints received have referred to the quality of service provided, and delays. Also, the percentage of complaints about service provision has reduced from the previous year. This reflects the changes in the delivery of council services following the implementation and subsequent easing of Covid-19 restrictions in Aberdeen City.

### Performance Indicators

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have outlined four key performance indicators for local authorities to use to monitor practice and identify any trends. The performance for 2021/22 has been provided, with comparison to the previous financial year where possible to show development or any areas that require improvement.

#### Indicator One – Total Number of Complaints Received

This indicator records the total number of complaints received. This is the sum of the number of complaints received at Stage 1 (this includes escalated complaints, as they were first received at Stage 1) and complaints received directly at Stage 2.

For benchmarking purposes, it is helpful to show this information as the number of complaints received per 1,000 population. This provides a consistent benchmark and indicator relevant to the size of our organisation.

In 2021/22 we received 1,350 Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints overall, which is a 26.9% increase from the previous year. This is comparable to 2019/20 complaint figures. Following the easing of Covid-

19 restrictions, we recognise there was an increased demand on services, which is reflected in the below table.

	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Aberdeen City Population</b>	227,430	229,060	227,560
<b>Total Complaints Received</b>	1,350	1,063	1,465
<b>Per 1,000 Population</b>	5.9	4.6	6.4

According to the National Records of Scotland ([www.nrscotland.gov.uk](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk)), the population estimate for Aberdeen City has reduced slightly in mid-2021 in comparison to the previous years.

### Indicator Two – Closed Complaints within the set timescales

The complaints handling procedure requires that Stage 1 complaints be closed within five working days and that Stage 2 complaints be closed within 20 working days. This indicator shows the total number of complaints closed within the standard timescale as a percentage of all complaints received.

The overall performance for all complaints closed within timescale was 61.47%, a slight reduction from the previous financial year (69.61%), however it should be noted fewer complaints had been received in 2020/21.

The reason why delays occur will continue to be explored and addressed with services in 2020/21. Training will be reviewed in order to better reinforce the requirements of the complaints handling procedure and ensure complaints are responded to appropriately and within statutory timescales.

Complaints closed within timescale	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	64.69%	71.58%	64.36%
<b>Stage 2</b>	44.92%	54.63%	35.03%
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	48.00%	68.60%	55.37%
<b>All</b>	61.47%	69.61%	60.4%

Whilst we aim to respond to complaints as quickly as we can and within the standard timescales, this may not always be possible; for a quality investigation to be carried out, an extension may be required. In these circumstances, an extension may be sought, and a revised deadline provided.

Please note that when an extension is authorised, the complaint is still considered “late” and is therefore not included in the Within Timescale figures.

Number of Complaints with an Extension	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	47	30	60
<b>Stage 2</b>	22	20	42
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	19	14	16

### Indicator Three – Average time in working days

This indicator represents the average time in working days for a full response to be provided to complaints at each stage.

The performance for Stage 2 complaints has reduced since last year. A main reason for this is our increased focus on the quality of responses provided. We aim to provide a clear and transparent description of the investigation and findings, and in some circumstances, this has meant a response has taken longer to be issued.

Average Working Days to Respond	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Stage 1</b>	6.7	5.8	6.5
<b>Stage 2</b>	25.0	22.0	25.3
<b>Escalated Stage 2</b>	23.9	18.6	21.6

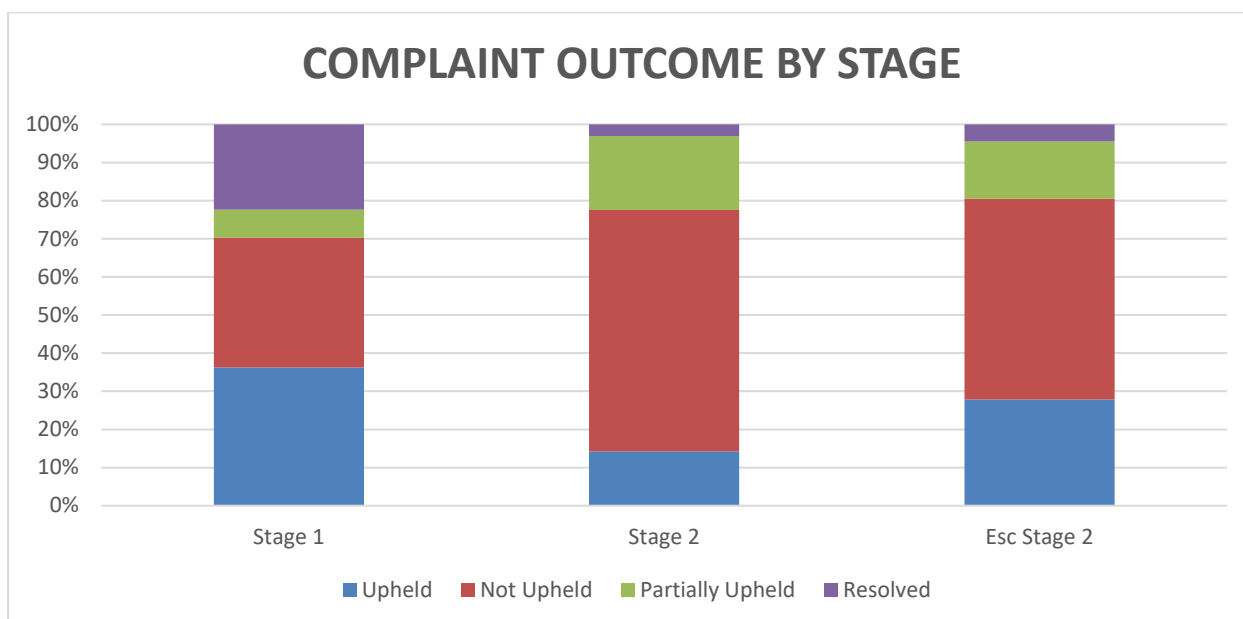
#### Indicator Four – Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld.

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. These outcomes are “resolved”, “upheld”, “partially upheld” or “not upheld”.

A complaint is resolved when both the complainant and investigating officer agree that action can or has been taken that provides a full resolution to the complaint, and therefore no further investigation is necessary. This outcome was introduced in April 2021, therefore there we have not given a comparison for the previous financial years.

Where it is found that procedures had been followed or the service provided as expected, a complaint would be recorded as “not upheld”. However, if this was not the case and we have identified failings, the complaint would be recorded as “upheld”. Where there are several points to a complaint and the decisions are a mixture of “upheld” and “not upheld”, the complaint is recorded as “partially upheld” overall.

The chart below show the outcomes for 2021/22 complaints at all stages of the process.



## Complaints considered by the SPSO

SPSO Cases	2021/22 (Current)	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Investigated</b>	2	4	2
<b>Upheld</b>	1	1	2
<b>Not Upheld</b>	0	2	0
<b>Partially Upheld</b>	1	1	0

Once a complaint has been dealt with at Stage 2 of the Complaints Handling Procedure, complainants may approach the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) if they remain dissatisfied. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland, including complaints about a Local Authority.

In 2021/22, the SPSO felt it appropriate to investigate 2 complaints. One complaint was upheld and the another was partially upheld. Both required action to be taken by Aberdeen City Council, with recommendations made by the SPSO.

Findings are published regularly on the SPSO's website, including decision reports for complaints handled by Aberdeen City Council at [www.spsso.org.uk/spsso](http://www.spsso.org.uk/spsso).

### Contact Us

As a council, we encourage people to give us their feedback on the services we provide. Please visit [www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/complaints](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/complaints) for more information about the Complaints Handling Procedure or to submit any feedback you may have.