



Annual Complaints Performance Report 2017/18

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview and analysis of all complaints received by Aberdeen City Council during the reporting period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 (Financial Year 2017/2018). This includes graphical information, examples of service improvement and details of future objectives for 2018/19. Comparisons from the previous reporting period, i.e. from 1 April 2016 to 31st March 2017 (Financial Year 2016/2017), have been included where appropriate.

Background

Aberdeen City Council follow the Scottish Local Authority Complaints Handling Procedure, implemented in 2012 by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the council's action or lack of action, or the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the council”. There are some exceptions to what can be considered a complaint, for example a first-time request for a service, such as reporting a pothole or a request for compensation.

The Complaints Handling Procedure provides Local Authorities with two opportunities to deal with complaints internally.

Stage 1 of the procedure is called Frontline Resolution and focuses on quick responses to straightforward issues which can be resolved at the first point of contact or within 5 working days. The SPSO advise that the majority of complaints should be resolved at Stage 1.

If the issue requires a more in-depth investigation, the complaint may be dealt with at Stage 2 which is called Investigation Stage. Alternatively, if a customer is dissatisfied with how their Stage 1 complaint was dealt with, they may escalate the complaint to Stage 2, referred to as Escalated Stage 2. A written response explaining the investigation findings must be provided and this is the council's final answer on the matter. The response is signed by the Director of the department concerned, or their representative. A formal acknowledgement should be provided within 3 working days of when the complaint was first received, and the written response should be issued within 20 working days.

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint within the timeframe outlined, an extension may be required. In this case, a new deadline date is agreed with the customer.

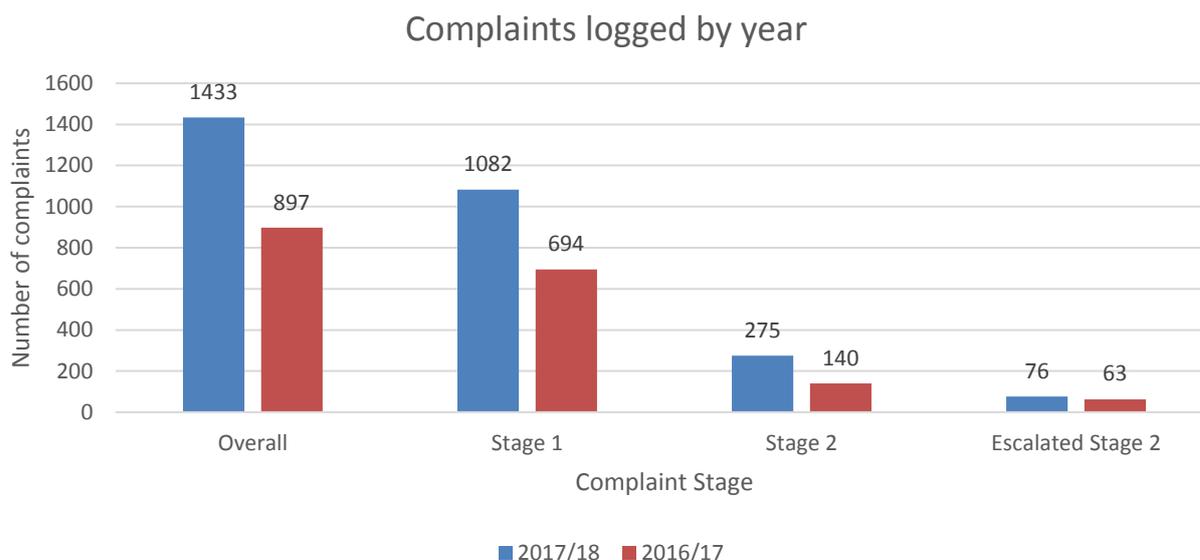
If the customer is unhappy with the Stage 2 response, the customer may then approach the SPSO to request an external review of how their complaint was handled by the Local Authority.

As of 1 April 2017, Social Work complaints are also managed under the Complaints Handling Procedure. This change will enable co-ordinated responses to be provided for complaints that cover more than one service, as well as facilitating improvement in service delivery across the council.

Complaint Volumes

During the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, 1,357 complaints were recorded and managed by Aberdeen City Council under the Complaints Handling Procedure. This is compared to 897 complaints received in the previous financial year (an increase of 59.75%). This rise is a positive and intended outcome and indicates an increased awareness of the procedure in both staff and customers. This increase is also attributed to the introduction of Social Work complaints to the Complaints Handling Procedure.

The following chart details the number of complaints received by year: -



Stage 1 Complaint Performance

Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 1,082 complaints were handled at Stage 1 of the Complaints Handling Procedure and accounted for 75.51% of the total complaints received. This is consistent with the previous financial year, where 77.37% of complaints were dealt with at Stage 1. These percentages are in line with the advice from the SPSO and displays a focus on earlier resolution by council staff.

The total number of complaints dealt with at Stage 1 has increased by 55.91% in comparison to the previous year. Out of the 1,082 Stage 1 complaints, 58.32% were responded to within the corporate timescale of 5 working days. This is a reduction of 6.24% in performance from 2016/17, which may be attributed to the increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints received.

Stage 2 Complaint Performance

Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 275 complaints were considered for investigation at Stage 2 (19.19% of the total complaints received). The portion of complaints dealt with at Stage 2 has increased slightly from the previous financial year, by 3.58%. Overall, the total number of Stage 2 complaints received has increased by 96.43% and again is attributed to the general rise in the number of complaints received.

The percentage of Stage 2 complaints responded to within the 20 working day timescale has increased by 13.96% compared to the previous financial year. This improvement follows a programme of training sessions delivered to staff focussing on the handling of Stage 2 complaints.

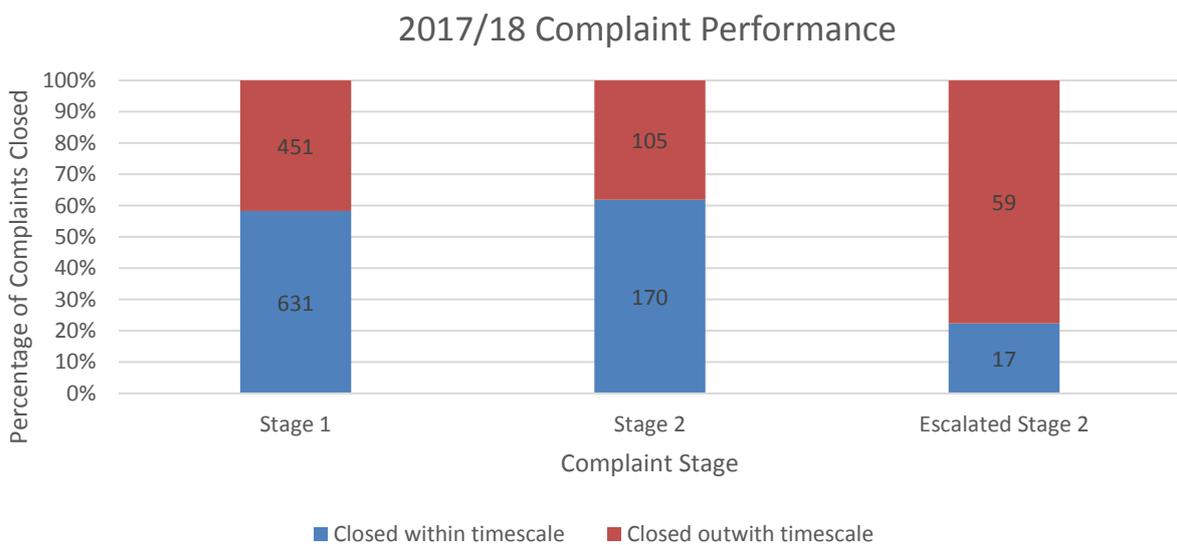
Escalated Stage 2 Complaint Performance

Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, 76 complaints were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the Complaints Handling Procedure. This is an increase of 20.63% of escalated complaints compared to the previous year.

The number of escalated Stage 2 complaints responded to on time has reduced by 31.60% overall, with 22.37% of these complaints dealt with within 20 working days. The reduction in performance shall be addressed with the departments involved and steps taken to encourage timely responses.

Overall Performance

The following details the number of complaints received and resolved on time by stage: -

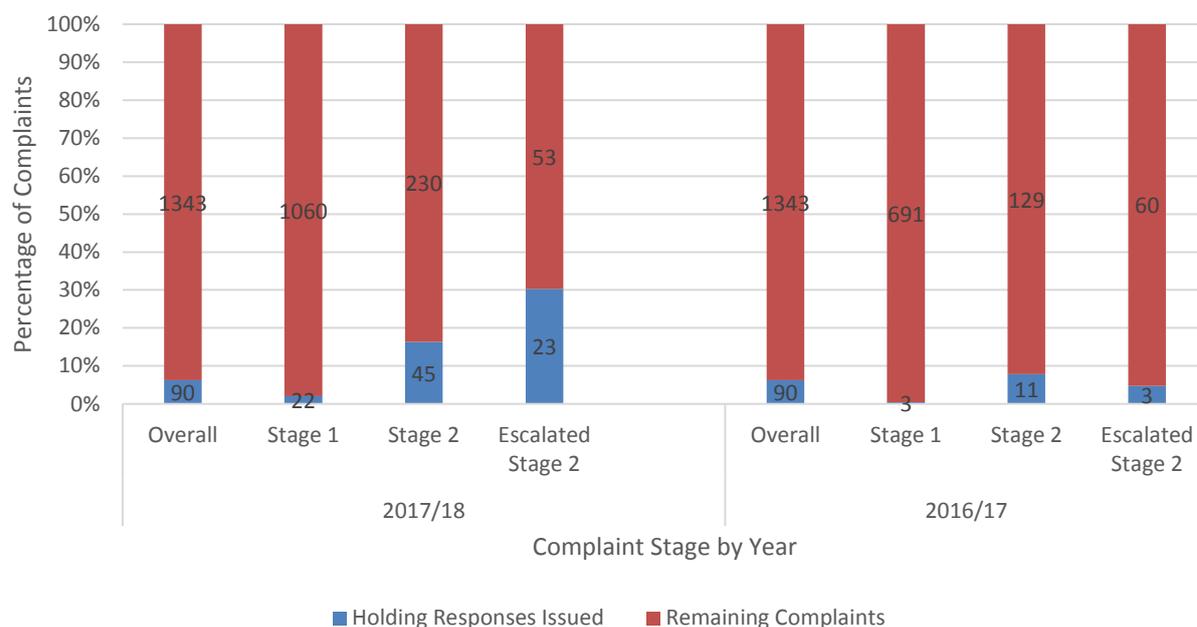


Holding Responses

It is not always possible to provide a response to a complaint within the standard timeframe, such as complaints received during school holidays about an education matter or complex complaints that require investigation. In these instances, a holding response should be provided to ensure the customer or parent understands when a full response will be provided. Greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of updating complainants on the progress of their case and following this, the percentage of holding responses provided overall has increased.

The following chart details the number of holding responses issued at each stage for 2017/18 and 2016/17: -

Holding Responses provided by Stage and Year



Complaint Categories

Complaints are categorised when they are received in order to reflect the overall theme or main concern of the complaint. The categories were reviewed and expanded for 2017/18, following the introduction of Social Work complaints to the Complaints Handling Procedure and to allow for more in-depth analysis.

The following table shows the categories of complaint considered across the council (those in italics were introduced in 2017/18): -

Category of Complaint	2017/18		2016/17	
	Complaints received	% of all complaints	Complaints received	% of all complaints
Customer Service	252	17.59%	234	26.09%
Quality of Service Provided	673	46.96%	359	40.02%
Employee Behaviour	203	14.17%	143	15.94%
Policy	70	4.88%	49	5.46%
Procedure	156	10.89%	108	12.04%
Equalities	4	0.28%	4	0.45%
<i>Amount of Service Provision</i>	14	0.98%	0	0.00%
<i>Breach of Confidentiality</i>	12	0.84%	0	0.00%
<i>Discrimination</i>	4	0.28%	0	0.00%
<i>Poor Communication</i>	26	1.81%	0	0.00%
<i>Quality of Information Provided</i>	6	0.42%	0	0.00%
<i>Refusal/Withdrawal of Service</i>	13	0.91%	0	0.00%

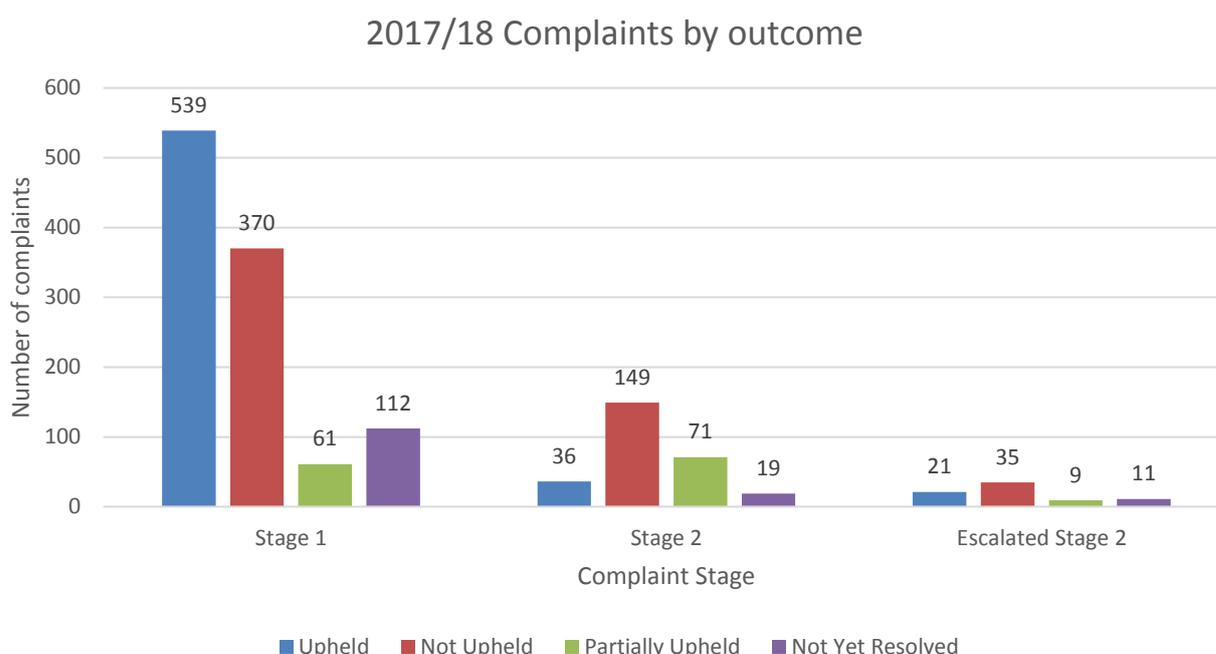
Complaint Outcomes

The possible outcome for a complaint is 'upheld', 'not upheld' or 'partially upheld'. If it were found that procedures had been followed or the service provided was as expected a complaint would be categorised as 'not upheld', however if this was not the case the complaint would be categorised as 'upheld'. In some instances, there may be several points in a complaint and if the decisions for these points are a mixture of upheld and not upheld, the complaint is recorded as 'partially upheld' overall.

Of the 1,433 complaints received during 2017/18, 596 were 'upheld' (41.59%), 554 were 'not upheld' (38.66%) and 141 were 'partially upheld' (9.84%). At the time of generating these reports, 142 complaints were not resolved (9.9% of all complaints). Due to this, the outcomes for these complaints are not available.

Overall, the complaint outcomes for 2017/18 are similar to those reported in 2016/17 and indicate a consistent approach is being used for complaint handling.

The following chart shows the number of complaints by outcome: -



The following table shows the complaint outcomes by year: -

Decision	2017/18		2016/17	
	Number of complaints	% of all complaints	Number of complaints	% of all complaints
Upheld	596	41.59%	365	40.69%
Not Upheld	554	38.66%	390	43.48%
Partially Upheld	141	9.84%	94	10.48%

Scottish Public Service Ombudsman

Once a complaint has been dealt with by the Local Authority at Stage 2 of the Complaints Handling Procedure, customers may then escalate their complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for consideration.

The SPSO felt it appropriate to investigate 8 Aberdeen City Council complaints in 2017-18 (compared to 4 complaints in 2016-17). Of the 8 complaints investigated, 2 were upheld, 1 partially upheld and 5 not upheld. The percentage of complaints upheld/partially upheld by the SPSO reduced to 37.5% in 2017/18 (compared to 50% in 2016/17) which is less than the sector total. Action to further improve complaint handling across the council will continue throughout 2018-19.

Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information about our services, which can help us to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. A sample of the service improvements made as a result of complaints in 2017/18 are outlined in the table below: -

Summary	Action Taken
In response to a complaint about missed bin collections across Aberdeen	A review of the waste collection route was undertaken, and the route amended where required
In response to a complaint regarding the handling of noise disturbances by Environmental Health	The authorisation process for the implementation of any necessary works to alleviate the noise disturbance has now been streamlined to enable a more timely resolution
In response to a complaint regarding road closures for the Great Run event	Staff training has been reviewed in order to ensure that the Stewards are better informed regarding the planning of any future events
In response to a complaint regarding disability awareness at Polling Stations	The content of staff training was amended to ensure staff are aware that tactile templates and sample large-print ballot papers are to be offered
In response to a complaint regarding poor customer service from the Council Tax department	The department introduced mentoring for staff in addition to training in order to mitigate any future occurrences
In response to a complaint regarding the timing of the questions in a telephone survey	The timing has been reviewed in order to ensure there is a sufficient delay between the answer period and the next question
In response to a complaint regarding a bus pass renewal	The delay was caused by an error in the new system process and due to this, any new systems will now be more thoroughly tested before implementation
In response to a complaint regarding placement in Temporary Accommodation	The policy was reviewed, and a placement review may now be considered after a period of time, dependent on how residents conduct their tenancy
In response to a complaint regarding the handling of a Section 75 Agreement Application	A template application form has now been made available on the website
In response to complaints regarding long waiting times when calling the Customer Contact Centre	We have taken a different approach in the way in which we allocate resource within our Customer Operations team to help reduce wait times
In response to a complaint regarding the automated Payment Line for Bulky Uplifts	The telephones in Marischal College were adjusted to accommodate the payment line requirements
In response to a complaint regarding the gritting of school playgrounds	The school reviewed their communication with parents regarding the clearing a priority path to and from the building
In response to a complaint regarding difficulties in following the payment instructions for Garden Maintenance	The letters sent to residents were updated to include the correct payment details
In response to a complaint regarding the policy of handing in items at Kingsford School reception	The policy was updated so that items could be handed in during the school day
In response to a complaint regarding the availability of meals at Woodside Primary School	A lunch ordering system was introduced which would prevent certain foods running out

2017/18 Future Work Programme Update

The Future Work Programme for 2017/18 has been successful with the following exercises completed: -

- All Stage 2 responses are quality checked by the corporate Customer Feedback Team to ensure that all points of complaints are addressed and reasons for complaint outcomes are clear
- Improvements have been made to the Aberdeen City Council website which has improved the customer experience when submitting a complaint online.
- Training has been held with services across the council in order to improve the quality of written complaint responses.

Future Work Programme for 2018/19

Aberdeen City Council is committed to providing our customers with the best possible service and it is important to us that complaints are resolved to their satisfaction. Our complaints improvement programme is an ongoing exercise which will continue into 2018/19 and will include:

- A new case management system will be introduced at the beginning of 2018/19, which will ensure consistency in reporting and enable the better handling of complaints.
- The handling of social work complaints is to be reviewed and improvements implemented where necessary.
- Training will continue to be delivered across services within the council as required in order to improve complaint handling and the quality of responses for complaints.
- The way that learning from complaints is reported will be reviewed, including trend analysis of all complaints in order to help identify potential improvements to communication or changes in procedures.

Contact Us

As a council, we want to encourage people to give us their feedback on the services we provide. Please contact CustomerFeedback@aberdeencity.gov.uk if you wish to provide any feedback on the content of this document.