



Annual Complaints Performance Report

2019/20



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.

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.

Alternatively, they may contact the Customer Feedback Team by telephone on 01224 523058 or write to: Customer Feedback Team, Business Hub 6, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB.



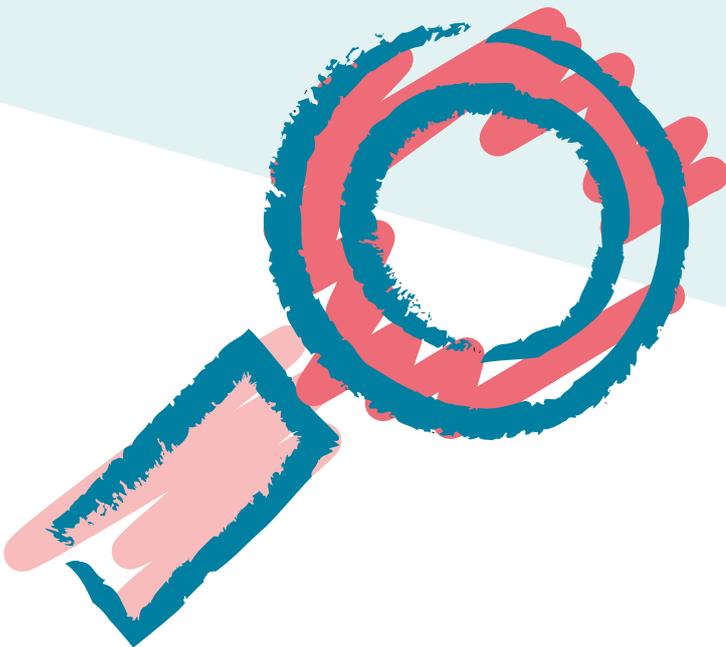


2019/20 Summary

In 2019/20, Aberdeen City Council received 1,586 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	2018/19	2019/20
Amount of Service Provision	1.5%	4.8%
Breach of Confidentiality	1.2%	0.8%
Council Policy	3.3%	4.9%
Delay in Services	1.5%	13.0%
Difficulty in Accessing Services	2.6%	5.9%
Discrimination	1.1%	0.1%
Equalities	0.5%	0.0%
Finance/Cost Issues	0.0%	1.9%
Non-Allocation / access to staff	0.2%	0.1%
Poor Communication	6.9%	9.8%
Procedure	2.3%	0.0%
Quality of Information Provided	5.2%	5.6%
Quality of Service	54.6%	36.2%
Refusal/Withdrawal of Service	0.8%	1.6%
Service Closure	0.0%	0.1%
Staff Conduct/Attitude	18.2%	15.1%

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) have outlined a variety of indicators as a basis for monitoring complaints handling performance. The performance for complaints from 2018/19 and 2019/20 has been detailed in order to provide a comparison.



Indicator One - Complaints received per 1,000 population

In order to determine the number of complaints received per 1,000 population, we count those received at Stage 1 and received directly at Stage 2.

In 2019/20 we received 1,465 Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints, which is a 26.5% increase from the previous year. This increase follows some changes to council services over the year, including the introduction of a chargeable garden waste collection permit and suspension of some council services in response to the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.

Category	2018/19	2019/20
Aberdeen City Population	228000	227560
Total Complaints Received	1158	1465
Per 1,000 Population	5.1	6.4

According to the National Records of Scotland (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk), the population estimate for Aberdeen City has reduced slightly since 2018/19.



Indicator Two - Closed complaints

The majority of closed complaints were handled at Stage 1 which is as expected. We aim to provide quick responses to straight-forward issues and deal with complex matters at Stage 2. There has been an increase in the number of escalated Stage 2 complaints, therefore consideration will be given as to whether some less straight-forward complaints would be better handled at Stage 2.

Category	2018/19	%	2019/20	%
Total Complaints	1132		1444	
Stage 1 Complaints	860	76.0%	1192	82.55%
Stage 2 Complaints	174	15.4%	142	9.83%
Escalated Stage 2 Complaints	98	8.7%	110	7.62%



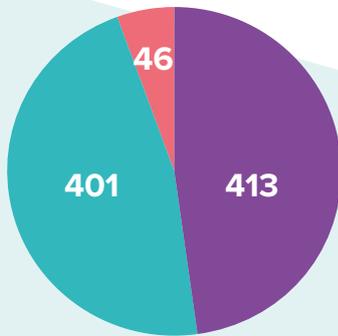
Indicator Three - Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld

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

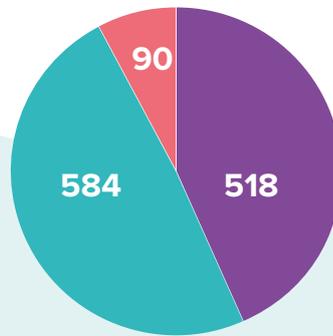
If it were found that procedures had been followed or the service provided as expected, a complaint would be recorded as “not upheld”. However, if this was not the case the complaint would be recorded as “upheld”. Where there are several points to a complaint and the decisions are a mixture of “upheld”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

The charts below show the number of complaints upheld, not upheld and partially upheld at each stage of the complaint procedure.

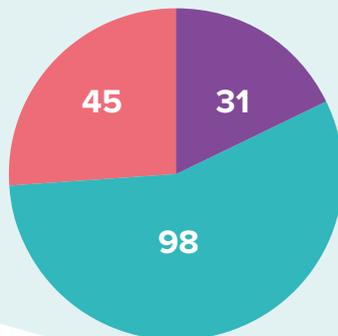
Stage 1: Complaint Outcomes 2018/19



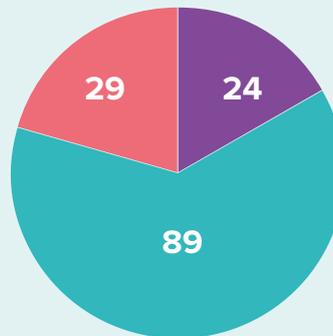
Stage 1: Complaint Outcomes 2019/20



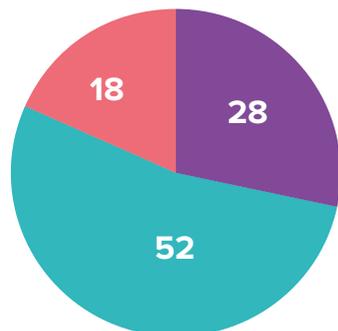
Stage 2: Complaint Outcomes 2018/19



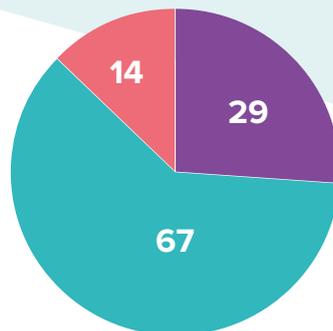
Stage 2: Complaint Outcomes 2019/20



Escalated Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes 2018/19



Escalated Stage 2 Complaint Outcomes 2019/20



Indicator Four - Average Response Times

The table below shows the average working days taken to respond to closed complaints at each stage of the complaint procedure.

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.

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

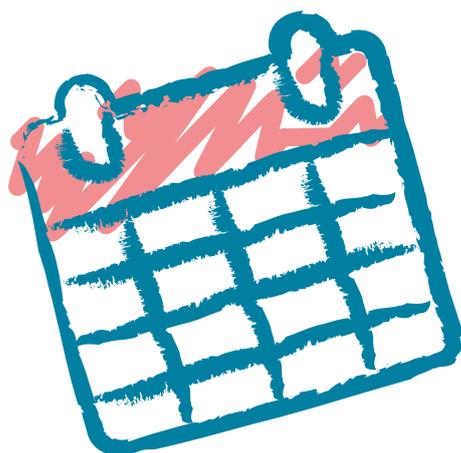
Average Working Days to Respond	2018/19	2019/20
Stage 1	8.5	6.5
Stage 2	26	25.3
Escalated Stage 2	28	21.6

Indicator Five - Performance against Timescales

We are required to respond to a Stage 1 complaint within 5 working days and a Stage 2 complaint within 20 working days.

As advised above, Stage 2 performance has reduced slightly in comparison to last year following an increased focus on the quality of responses provided.

Percentage of Complaints Closed within Timescale	2018/19	2019/20
Stage 1	62.8%	69.6%
Stage 2	45.4%	43.7%
Escalated Stage 2	39.8%	60.9%





Indicator Six - Number of cases where an extension is authorised

Where a response has taken longer to be issued, an update is given to the complainant with a new date for response.

Stage 1 complaints may be extended by a further 5 working days. The timeframe for an extension to a Stage 2 complaint investigation is not set and is determined based on factors such as the nature of the complaint, the evidence available and if the complaint relates to more than one service or department.

Greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of updating complainants on the progress of their complaint, and due to this there has been an increase in the number of extensions issued for Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.

Number of Complaints with an Extension	2018/19	2019/20
Stage 1	43	60
Stage 2	73	42
Escalated Stage 2	18	16

Indicator Seven - Customer Satisfaction

A customer satisfaction survey is issued to customers following the closure of their complaint to establish if the complaint was handled to their satisfaction and to identify areas of improvement. The feedback is used to inform the content of training sessions held with officers to ensure that the sessions target the relevant issues.

The survey results will be published on the Aberdeen City Council website for 2019/20 in a separate report.



Indicator Eight - Learning from complaints

Upon closure of every complaint, we identify any learning points. This is particularly important where complaints are upheld, but even a complaint which is not upheld can highlight the need for change.

A sample of the improvements made as a result of complaints in 2019/20 are outlined in the following table.

Complaint Topic	Action Taken
A customer highlighted that the guidance they received regarding renewing their parking permit was incorrect	We updated our guidance and our standard email correspondence
A customer was advised they had been in contact with several different members of staff regarding their housing application, which caused confusion	We carried out a review of the teams involved so that a single member of staff is appointed to a customer's application
A customer advised that a member of library staff did not adequately manage a difficult situation	We organised training for staff specifically on dealing with difficult situations
A customer experienced a delay in accessing a telephone in the Customer Service Centre	We installed additional telephones
A customer reported there had been a delay in cleaning urine from an elevator	We carried out a review of the cleaning response service
A customer reported a delay in their email regarding Council Tax being dealt with	We organised for additional staff to monitor the incoming emails, to ensure they are dealt with more timeously
A customer contacted us about a delay in their council housing repair	We reviewed how we update tenants when a repair has been delayed due to materials being temporarily unavailable
A customer reported that their assisted waste collection had not been carried out	We identified there had been difficulties in accessing the property due to the size of our standard vehicle. We organised for a smaller vehicle to attend the route.
A customer explained there had been a delay in a reported fault being responded to	We reviewed how the team monitor incoming reports
A customer had difficulties in finding the opening hours for our recycling centres	Our website was updated and we have regularly promoted the Household Waste and Recycling Centre information on our social media platforms, in order to raise public awareness of this service
A customer was not aware of the protocol for outings with children using childcare services	We reviewed our Welcome Booklets and Registration Forms to provide further guidance regarding outings.
A customer reported they were unaware of the timescale for a response regarding communal repairs	We updated our automated email acknowledgement to include a timescale for when customers can expect a response
A customer advised that their household waste bin and not been collected and our records did not reflect this	We identified that additional support to new or agency staff was required to ensure the staff were confident in using the reporting system correctly



A customer explained there had been a significant delay in their application for a garage rental	We organised for additional staff to be trained in processing these applications
A customer advised the categories in our equalities monitoring form were incorrect	We will replicate the categories outlined in the Census 2021 in our equalities monitoring forms
A customer was not given temporary heaters whilst their heating system was being repaired	Our engineers are now more frequently briefed regarding the process for offering tenants temporary heaters, to help ensure they are aware of this option
A customer was unable to report a pothole using our online reporting form	We updated our system to show that the area in question had been adopted by Aberdeen City Council, in order for repairs to be requested
A customer advised the waiting time to renew their Blue Badge application was unreasonable	Following an upgrade to the national system, we are now able to identify renewal applications and process these more quickly and reduce delays
A customer explained the area description for a Bus Lane Fine was not detailed enough	We now include the street name in our Bus Lane Enforcement Charge Notices
A customer advised that the online payment system for education services was not user friendly	We reviewed and updated the music service process to allow customers to accommodate applications for multiple children

Complaints considered by the SPSO

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 2019/20, the SPSO felt it appropriate to investigate 2 complaints, whereas in 2018/19 they investigated 7. Of the 2 complaints investigated in 2019/20, both were upheld.

It is useful to note that these complaints were originally dealt with by Aberdeen City Council in 2017 and 2018, and improvements have since been made to complaint handling practices.

Changes

In 2018/19, the SPSO conducted a review of the Complaints Handling procedure. This review led to the content of the procedure being updated following feedback from organisations under the SPSO's jurisdiction and referred to research and good practice in relation to using alternative resolution approaches and improving access to complaints for vulnerable groups.

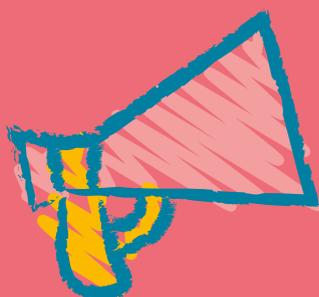
The updated procedure will be implemented from 1 April 2021, with a third outcome of "resolved" introduced. It is anticipated the additional outcome will enable organisations to quickly identify appropriate solutions to some complaints, without the need for an in-depth investigation or detailed response.

Any changes to reporting will be reflected in future reports.

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 for more information about the Complaints Handling Procedure or to submit any feedback you may have.





For more information please visit
www.aberdeencity.gov.uk