

Agenda Item	6
Report No	AC/30/24

The Highland Council

Committee: **Audit Committee**

Date: **28 November 2024**

Report Title: **Annual Complaints Performance Report – 2023/24**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to publish its Corporate Complaints Performance annually. **Appendix 1** covers the period 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023.
- 1.2 The SPSO publishes a list of 8 Key Performance Indicators which all Local Authorities must report to members, staff, and citizens. Performance against these indicators are summarised below and detailed in the report appendix.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - (i) Scrutinise the performance outlined in the Annual Complaints Report for 2022/23 at Appendix 1, including:
 - that most complaints (57%) closed in the period were considered Frontline and did not require investigation, with 68.5% of those closed considered to be resolved to the satisfaction of the customer.
 - the time to respond to a Frontline complaint continues to be within the target of 5 working days with an average of 3.7 days in 22/23 showing a maintained positive position.
 - that work is still required to improve the performance of Investigation complaints and that this is an ongoing improvement process.
 - (ii) Agree to publish the appended report on the Council's website and submit this to the SPSO.
 - (iii) note the additional Child Friendly Complaints process which became law on 16 July 2024.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource Implications - There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However, the report highlights the volume of complaints, FOIs, requests for service and general enquires received by the Council on an annual basis and which require a response from services.
- 3.2 Legal Implications - The Council's complaint process is fully compliant with the SPSO's statutory frontline resolution, and complex investigation complaint processes, and officers participate in benchmarking undertaken in partnership with the SPSO.
- 3.3 Risk Implications - Complaints management is a critical component of the Council's overall approach to citizen and public engagement and to achieving more efficient and effective delivery of services. The Corporate Management Team have arrangements in place via a central team, to prioritise complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and achieve statutory targets. Failure to deliver against our statutory obligations will lead to intervention by the SPSO or Information Commissioner.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) Health – There are no implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 Gaelic Implications - There are no new implications arising from this report.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report on performance and therefore an impact assessment is not required. The new Child Friendly Complaints process will be subject to further impact assessments and this will be reported to members separately.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Council follows the 2 Stage Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) laid down by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), a copy of the Highland version can be found [here](#) .
- 5.2 All complaints are managed by the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team (CRIT). On receipt of a complaint the Team assess it according to the MCHP and only valid complaints are progressed.
- 5.3 Complaints which are validated are managed as either a Frontline response (within 5 working days for less complex complaints) or an Investigation response (within 20 working days for more complex cases). Complaints do not have to move through both stages; if on initial assessment the matters are deemed complex, they will be moved to the investigation stage and the customer informed accordingly.
- 5.4 Complaints can be extended at Frontline to 10 working days, but only in exceptional circumstances and any which are, will be recorded as not meeting the required timescales. No Frontline complaint should go over 10 working days and if it does it is escalated to an investigation complaint for oversight and signature of the relevant

Head of Service or ECO (nb this will now be the relevant Chief Officer). Equally an investigation complaint can be extended past the 20-working day deadline.

- 5.5 This report focuses on how the Council manages the complaints it receives however many complaints received are often first requests for service, appeals, or other administrative processes, rather than complaints and are moved into the correct channel for action and the customer informed. Examples of this are Council Tax and Planning Appeals, or first requests for service detailing issues with potholes and/or waste issues where there is already an existing route to report these.
- 5.6 In 2023/24 there were 1929 'complaints' submitted by customers across a variety of channels including web form, email to service staff, letter, face to face and telephone contact, and an additional 1091 to the complaints@highland.gov.uk email address. Of this total (3020) only 1146 were assed as valid complaints, with others signposted to the correct route for a response e.g. a request for service or appeals procedure. Each case involves careful assessment and subsequent discussion with the customer to explain the process and can be time-consuming and also frustrating for the customer if they have chosen the wrong route. For comparison cases received in 22/23, which were not complaints were 2731. The non-validated complaints have been recorded in the last two years, and this demonstrates a significant pressure on the CRIT team which is increasing.
- 5.7 The complaints the Council receive represent a small proportion of the recorded contact through the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. Customers can contact the Council via the website, telephone and walk in channels for a variety of needs such as:
- Make a Payment i.e., Council Tax, Rents
 - Report a Problem i.e., Missed Bin, Pothole or Fly-Tipping
 - Request for Service i.e., Garden Waste, Apply for Housing or Licensing
 - General Enquiry – where there is no defined process set up to meet the request of the customer this internal form is used by Customer Services.
- 5.8 In 2023/24 there were 376,764 recorded transactions in CRM. An increase of 14% on figures in 2022/23. However, it is important to note that only **0.3% of all recorded contact** is considered a complaint.
- 5.9 It is helpful to view this contact within the context of associated requests for information which is also managed by the CRIT team:
- Freedom of Information requests – 1618 cases closed in 23/24
 - Data Rights requests – including Subject Access Requests – 275 cases were closed in 2023/24, from 205 cases in 22/23.
- 6. Annual Complaints Report 2023/24**
- 6.1 The Council is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to publish its Corporate Complaints Performance against the 8 Key Performance Indicators. **Appendix 1** covers the period 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2024.
- 6.2 The average number of days taken to respond to Frontline complaints has remained within the target of 5-day target at **3.7 days in 2023/24** and maintaining a positive position from 2022/23. These are complaints that do not require investigation. This continues to show the positive impact the central team have had in recent years.
- 6.3 Most complaints (**58.5%**) are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1). Of those, **68.7%** are categorised as the outcome 'resolved' and did not require an investigation.

- 6.4 The percentage of Frontline complaints handled within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has also maintained a positive position at **81.1%**. Whilst performance at the Frontline complaint stage continues to improve and remain steady, work is still required to improve performance on Investigation (Stage 2) complaint performance. Of the complaints considered at stage 2, 52.2% were handled within the 20-working day timescale set by the SPSO, whilst an improvement of 10.6% on 2022/23, it is significantly short of the 80% Council set target.
- 6.5 Improvement at Investigation stage will remain a focus for the CRIT team and services across the Council in 2024/25, however it remains the case that there are a significant volume of complaints where investigations must take longer than the 20 working days. Where there is a delay, and in line with SPSO guidance, we aim to ensure customers are advised of this timeously and provided with the reasons for any delay, and ongoing liaison with the Service is undertaken to ensure the delays are kept to as much of a minimum as possible.
- 6.6 **Appendix 2** – provides a rank order of complaints by function of the Council in 2023/24 and a comparison with 2022/21 and 2022/23 data. Note it is not possible due to service restructures and system changes to compare this with data in previous years. The functions with the greater number of complaints, in the main, are in line with functions that deliver services to significant numbers of the whole population.

7. Next Steps

7.1 Training and Improvement

The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager and Corporate Performance & Information Governance Manager delivered in person and online sessions in Spring 2024 on Complaint handling, Freedom of Information and Data Rights performance and process. The feedback received was very positive and has led to improvements in officers' knowledge and understanding of their role in the process.

- 7.2 The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager will be providing each new Service cluster with an overview of their complaint data for 2023/24 together with information on lessons learnt.

- 7.3 All overdue case data is available to the Corporate Management Team, Service Management Teams, and their support staff, to support greater oversight on cases that are due imminently and any overdue. Performance against Complaint and Freedom of Information handling is also scrutinised at each Strategic Committee as part of the combined Quarterly Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report.

- 7.4 The Council continues to participate in quarterly meetings of the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN), operating in partnership with the SPSO. Benchmarking activity has been developed in recent years with the aim of supporting improvement, with Highland part of a family group which includes Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Scottish Borders, Argyle & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, and Aberdeenshire councils. This benchmarking information has not yet been shared with Local Authorities but will be available in the coming months.

7.5 Child Friendly Complaints Process

All Local Authorities via the LACHN group have been liaising with the SPSO on the implementation of a new 'child friendly' complaints process in Scotland to support the duties contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (the UNCRC Act) has now taken effect from 16 July 2024 and guidance and principles have been provided to organisations under the SPSO's jurisdiction - [Child Friendly Complaints Handling Process Guidance | SPSO](#)

A separate update will be provided to all members on the Councils implementation of this key piece of legislation, which will positively impact on children's rights.

- 7.6 The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager has continued to work with colleagues in Customer Services, ICT/Web User Experience, and My Council project team, to understand how improvements in website design and contact methods can reduce incoming cases not validated as complaints and ensure the customer is routed to the correct destination first time.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Corporate

Date: 22 August 2024

Author: Angela Morrison, Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Annual Complaints Performance Report 2023/24

Appendix 2 - Functions where more than 10 complaints (all stages) have been received in rank order

Annual Complaints Performance Report 2023-2024

Valuing Customer Feedback

Listening * Open * Valuing * Improving * Supporting * Partnering * Delivering
Èisteachd * Fosgailte * Luach * Leasachadh * Taic * Com-pàirteachas * Libhrigeadh

Ambitious

Sustainable

Connected

www.highland.gov.uk

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Executive Summary

The Council's definition of a complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the local authority's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the local authority.”

This report details the Council's corporate complaints performance in 2023-24, against Key Performance Indicators laid down by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for all Scottish Local Authorities.

In this report, we will explain how the Council have performed against these indicators and how we value complaints to improve and inform service delivery. The Council is committed to providing high quality and timely services. Sometimes, as a customer you may feel that the service you received has fallen below the Council's standards. When this happens, we want to understand the situation, fix any issues quickly and learn from them.

Our Complaints Handling Procedure reflects the Council's commitment to valuing complaints and seeing them as a way of improving our services. We will seek to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and undertake a thorough, impartial, and fair investigation of all complaints, whilst ensuring responses are delivered on time and are of a consistent high quality.

If you wish to provide feedback on this report, we welcome your comments. To do so please [email us](#) or write to us at Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX.

Allan Gunn - Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate)

Report Headlines

Most complaints **57%** are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1) and of those, **68.5%** were resolved at that stage, and did not require an Investigation. We have reasonably concluded that most customers were therefore satisfied with the way that we responded to their complaints.

The average number of days taken to respond to frontline complaints is within the target of 5 working days and is **3.7 days in 2023/24**, maintained from 3.6 days in 2022/23. These are complaints that do not require an investigation.

The percentage of frontline complaints handled within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has maintained performance at **81.2%** compared to 81.4% in 2022/23. There has been an increase in Investigation performance to **52.2%** (10.6% improvement from 2022/23) where the SPSO target is 20 working days.

Across a range of indicators performance has improved in the last year and as part of an improving trend over the past 5 years. There is still work to be done to continuously improve our performance and the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team aims to drive and support the change required directly with responsible Services. While most frontline complaints are now handled within target timescales (5 days), (and therefore avoiding escalation) in 2023/24, it remains the case that Investigation and Escalated complaints still require significant resource to improve timescale performance, this will remain a focus for the team, continuing the work with colleagues across the Council, in 2024/25.

Background

Customer enquiries, requests for service and complaints are recorded on our customer relationship management system. For context there were 376,764 transactions in 2023/24 of which 1,146 (0.3%) were customer complaints. This is an increase in total transactions from 2022/23 (321,288).

Scottish Councils operate a complaints process which considers complaints as either:

- **Frontline** - straightforward issues that are easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation. This could mean an on-the-spot apology, explanation, or other action to resolve the complaint within 5 working days.
- **Investigation.** For issues that have not been resolved at the frontline or that are complex or require a detailed examination before we can state our position. We aim to provide a definitive response within 20 working days following a thorough investigation of the points raised.

This mandatory complaint process is defined by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). It is important to note that a complaint does not need to be considered at Frontline resolution before progressing to Investigation. When a complaint is received, the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team decide the appropriate stage - in many instances the team can now resolve the complaint straightaway. Where customers are dissatisfied with our decision following an Investigation, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to consider their complaint further.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Annual Performance Indicators

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has established **8 performance indicators** which are used by local authorities to monitor complaints and to benchmark their performance with other local authorities which are similar in scale and demography.

These are set out below together with the Council's annual performance for 2023/24.

Note: Following the pandemic, benchmarking data via the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) was not collected for 2020/21 and 2021/22. There is limited information for 2022/23, but it is hoped to provide complete benchmarking data for 2023/24.

Indicator 1 - The total number of complaints received per thousand of population.

This indicator records the total number of complaints received by the Council in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 per 1,000 population.

For Highland there were 4.9 complaints logged per 1,000 of population during 2023/24, an increase of 1.1 from 2022/23.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Population Estimate	234,770	235,180	235,540	235,830	235,430	238,060	238,060
Complaints Per 1,000	9.3	6.1	7.3	4.4	5.2	3.8	4.8

The Council validated a total of **1146 complaints** in 2023/24, an increase from 2022/23 of 28% on 2022/23 figures (903 validated) although this is still lower than 2021/22 (1,217 validated). Policy and legislative changes, together with seasonal, social, economic, and other external factors throughout the year, can all influence the volume of complaints received, however in addition, extensive work has been undertaken by the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team to only progress complaints as defined by the Model Complaints Handling Procedure via our assessment process.

Citizens who choose to engage digitally with the Council's complaints process receive email and telephone responses, which provides quicker delivery timescales than traditional methods, however complaints may be submitted by a variety of methods including letter, face-to-face, email, online form, or by contacting their local councillor. The Council understands that customers may be unable, or reluctant to make a complaint and we can accept complaints from a friend, relative or advocate if they are given consent to complain on their behalf.

Indicator 2 - Complaints closed at Frontline and Investigation as a percentage of all complaints closed.

The term 'closed' refers to those complaints where a response has been provided for the customer, and at the time no further action is required (regardless of whether it is Frontline or Investigation and whether any subsequent action takes place).

This indicator provided information on the number of complaints closed at Frontline, Investigation and those Frontline complaints that have been closed and subsequently progressed to Investigation due to the customer's request or where the timescale for a Frontline response has elapsed.

	% of all Cases closed 2017/18	% of all Cases closed 2018/19	% of all Cases closed 2019/20	% of all Cases closed 2020/21	% of all Cases closed 2021/22	% of all Cases closed 2022/23	% of all Cases closed 2022/23
Closed at Frontline	90.6	82.7	73.7	72.0	67.9	62.6	58.5
Closed at Investigation	5.9	12.6	22.7	24.6	17.1	25.4	30.8
Closed after progression from Frontline to Investigation or where the Frontline timescale has expired	3.5	4.7	3.5	3.4	14.9	12	10.7

There were **1102 complaints closed** during 2023/24, 628 (57%) at Frontline, 347 (31.5%) at Investigation and 127 (11.5%) after progression from frontline to investigation (escalated). Most of our complaints are received and resolved at frontline; however, there has been a steady increase in those complaints which are assessed immediately as an Investigation. This increase may indicate an increasing complexity in the complaints being investigated.

Indicator 3 - The number of complaints upheld or partially upheld/not upheld at each stage as a percentage of complaints closed in full at each stage.

There is a requirement for a formal outcome to be recorded for each complaint. Formal outcomes are the complaint is either **upheld**, **partially upheld**, **not upheld** or a new SPSO outcome of **resolved** which was introduced as part of the SPSO's revised MCHP in 2021/22.

A resolved outcome is where both the Council and the customer has agreed the case has been resolved to a suitable resolution and can be closed.

Performance over time is shown in the table on the right.

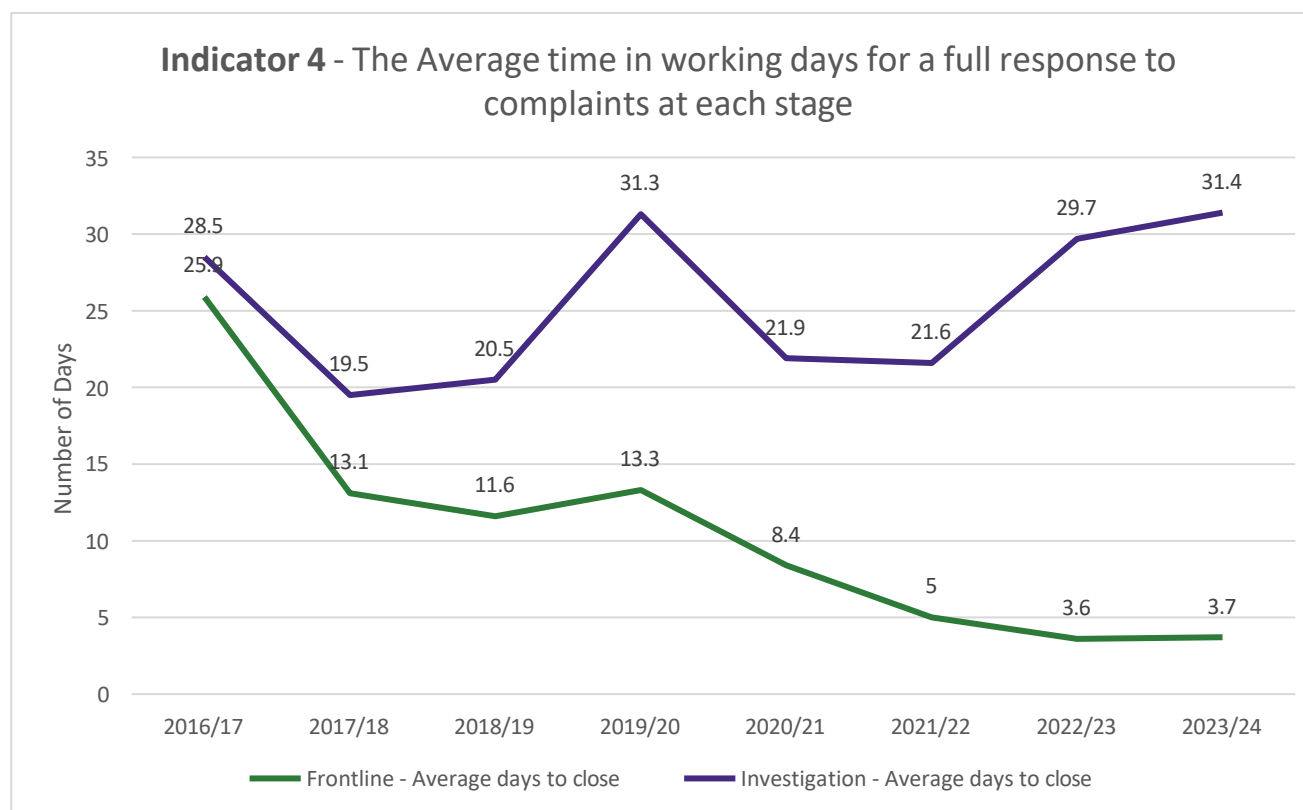
Given the significant number of cases classified with this new category and to ensure accuracy, a review was undertaken of those cases closed as 'resolved' but where it was subsequently reopened (i.e., not resolved) – out of all complaints in 2021/22 this accounted for 24 cases, and we can be confident this classification is being used accurately by the team. We have continued to monitor this in 2022/23, and 2023/24 and confirm the outcome with the customer.

Frontline	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Resolved
2017/18	498 (26.5%)	431 (22.9%)	953 (50.6%)	n/a
2018/19	284 (25.7%)	256 (23.1%)	567 (51.2%)	n/a
2019/20	250 (20.7%)	256 (21.2%)	699 (58.0%)	n/a
2020/21	230 (31.2%)	241 (32.7%)	266 (36.1%)	n/a
2021/22	32 (4.0%)	19 (2.4%)	81 (10.1%)	673 (83.6%)
2022/23	3 (0.5%)	1 (0.2%)	16 (2.8%)	549 (96.5%)
2023/24	53 (8.4%)	52 (8.3%)	93 (14.8%)	430 (68.7%)
Investigation				
2017/18	20 (16.3%)	38 (30.9%)	65 (52.8%)	n/a
2018/19	30 (17.8%)	50 (29.6%)	89 (52.7%)	n/a
2019/20	65 (17.5%)	104 (28.0%)	202 (54.4%)	n/a
2020/21	55 (21.8%)	107 (42.5%)	90 (35.7%)	n/a
2021/22	13 (6.4%)	47 (23.2%)	73 (36.0%)	70 (34.5%)
2022/23	39 (16.9%)	66 (28.6%)	101 (43.7%)	25 (10.8%)
2023/24	58 (16.7%)	80 (23.1%)	181 (52.2%)	28 (8.1%)

Indicator 4 - The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

The Council aims to respond to **Frontline** complaints within **5 working days** and an **Investigation** complaint within **20 working days**.

As shown on the chart below, the average number of days taken to respond to **Frontline** complaints has **reduced from 25.9 days in 2016/17 to 3.6 days in 2022/23** and this performance has slightly increased in **2023/24 to 3.7 days**. The average number of days taken to respond to **Investigation** complaints has continued to **increase to 29.7 days in 2022/23 to 31.4 days in 2023/24**



Indicator 5 - The number of complaints which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 working days and 20 working days.

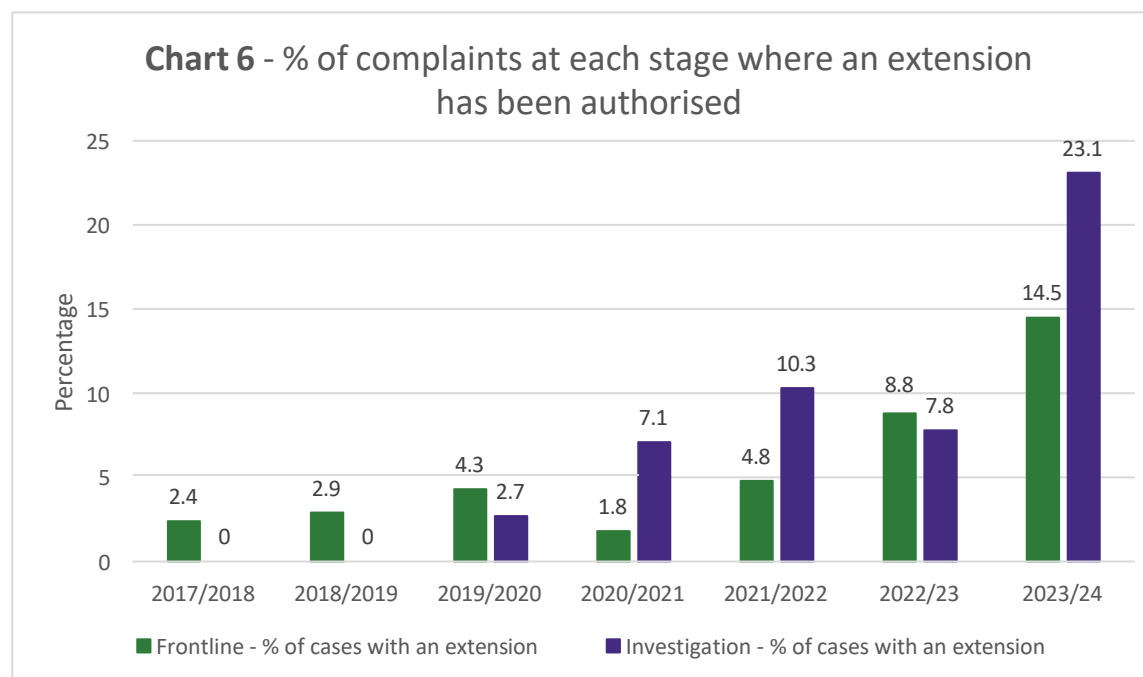
This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including cases where an extension to the timescales has been agreed.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number closed at Frontline Resolution	802	502	597	399	498	463	510
% within 5 working days	42.6%	45.4%	49.5%	54.1%	61.9%	81.4%	81.1%
Number closed at Investigation	78	109	234	173	113	96	181
% Investigation closed within 20 working days	63.8%	64.7%	63.1%	68.7%	55.7%	41.6%	52.2%
Number closed at Escalation	55	39	40	35	78	109	57
% Escalation closed within 20 working days	75.3%	61.9%	69.0%	85.7%	44.1%	28.4%	44.9%

Council performance on the number of frontline complaints managed within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has maintained it's significant improvement on previous figures and evidences the effective work of the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team to answer as many complaints as possible at Frontline without referral to back-office staff. There continues to be significant work to maintain response times on Investigation complaints, although the performance has **improved by 10.6% since 2022/23**. There are several interlinked reasons for the lower level of performance – including the complexity of cases which requires further investigation time, and periods of absence in both the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team and Services during holiday periods.

Indicator 6 - The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension of 5 or up to 20 days timelines have been authorised.

91 (14.5%) frontline complaints (50 during 2021/22) were authorised with a 5-day extension. 80 (23.1%) investigation complaints were authorised with an extension up to 20 working days. With agreement from the customer, we apply an extension when it is deemed necessary and due to the complexity of the issues.



An extension to a complaint is by exception and are generally approved by the Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager in conjunction with Heads of Service/Executive Chief Officers. We will continue to challenge our frontline performance for extending the number of days to resolve these complaints. Our aim is to further reduce the number of instances when extensions are necessary however the steady increase can be attributed to better recording, recognition of the complexities of some cases, and correct application of approved extensions.

Indicator 7 - The Complaints Handling Procedure followed by the Council requires us to report on customer satisfaction with the complaints service provided.

Normally the Council conducts an annual survey of performance and attitudes from its Citizens' Panel to inform customer satisfaction. It includes specific questions on complaint management and performance. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the survey has not been run since 2019. It is proposed to develop a feedback mechanism for customers using the complaints process and gather their feedback directly. This will be implemented for the Annual Complaint's performance report in 2024/2025.

Indicator 8 - Outlining improvements to services or procedures as a result of the consideration of complaints

Continuing the work from 2022/23, during 2023/24 work has focused on a number of areas -

- Continued engagement with Service Management Teams
- Targeted engagement with sections of the Council receiving the most complaints
- Renewed focus on resolution as an outcome and focus of the team resolving customer complaint at first point of contact.
- Focus on quality assurance procedures to ensure responses are provided to customers of a corporate standard
- Ongoing training with Customer Services Officers to refine and deliver a comprehensive complaint service including full certification from the SPSO in both stages of their complaints handling training
- Participation with the My Council project team to deliver improvements based on learning from complaints
- Input into the Scottish Public Services 'Child Friendly Complaints guidance which has now gone live from July 16 2024
- Increasing the links and understanding of roles with our colleagues in the frontline of customer services.

Compliments Received

During 2023/24 the Council also received compliments for the services provided. Some examples of compliments received during this time are shown below. It is important to recognise when excellent services are being delivered and the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team thank all customers for their compliments and ensure the details are passed on to the member of staff directly.

- *"Thank you for all the road mending on The Black Isle, much needed and much appreciated"*– **Roads Team**
- *Customer would like to thank the HC for the cleaning of drains in Dingwall and also for replacement of lights behind the Post Office in Dingwall.*– **Roads and Street Lighting**
- *"I want to take this opportunity to thank you for listening to my concerns. I cannot even begin to express how much has improved....since our meeting.* – **Education & Learning**
- *"I attended my local civic amenity site earlier this week and I was impressed with the service I received. I was greeted by the attendant very quickly on arrival at site. They asked me what waste types I had and then took the time to explain where each waste type was to go. I found the site to be well signposted with a high level of cleanliness throughout. It was clear to me, good housekeeping is taken seriously. Thanks for the positive experience".*– **Waste Team**
- *"I have just been on the phone to non domestic rates.....what a lovely person so polite and knowledgeable and helpful. They are a credit to the business and they have made my day what a star"*– **Non-Domestic Rates Team**
- *"Public toilets - (1) Brora and (2) Aviemore. Used them recently pleased to have them open and clean. I made a donation both times. Thank you"*– **Amenities Team**
- *"Customer called to thank the two staff that called to repair the fence. Customer is absolutely delighted with the fence, they cleared up after the repair, both staff were very nice.*– **Housing Repairs Team**
- *"This morning I received very helpful assistance in the operations team of the Highland Council. I really appreciated their help and the professional diligence/competence demonstrated"* – **Revenues**
- *"I ordered a bulky uplift but only one of the items listed was showing on the local depot form. I contacted the Highland Council on their Dingwall number and the lady managed the call professionally and efficiently and emailed the Wick member of staff who called me within minutes to rectify the issue. I was informed that the mattress would be collected within half an hour it was gone in ten mins. True professionalism and customer service shown by all involved. Thank you and well done"* – **Customer Services and Waste Teams**
- *"Customer would like to thank the people who did the grass cutting etc at the Cemetery"* - **Grounds Maintenance Team**
- *"The local plumber attended to repair a leaking pipe. Very efficient and mended in minutes"* – **Housing Repairs Team**
- *"I just wanted to say how helpful the council's CRIT team have been with respect to actioning my recent FOI requests. Credit where credit is due, their response time has been impressive and the courteous manner in which my requests have been handled has been sincerely appreciated"* – **CRIT Team**

Complaints investigated by the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO)

When a customer is not satisfied with our final response to a complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman to investigate their complaint. The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman is the final arbiter for complaints about public services.

Each year elected members are presented with a report which set out the number and types of complaints relating to the Council that have been considered by the SPSO and the subsequent judgements in the cases where the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman's inquiry has concluded. The detailed report was presented to the Audit Committee in November 2024.

Conclusion

Our customers are at the center of the Councils service delivery model. We aim to focus on listening to our customers and use their feedback to make changes so that we can deliver improvements. The ambitious My Council Programme aims to improve our approach to customer contact throughout the organisation. – The Operational Delivery Plan incorporate a range of workstreams and change projects which will deliver improvement and transformation.

This report demonstrates how we are continuously improving our performance and in the current financial climate, there are challenges facing local authorities in their service delivery and in achieving positive results around complaints. However, the MCHP framework of positive customer engagement, ensuring customers are involved from the outset and providing channels which make it easier for them to let us know when things go wrong, underpin our improvement ambitions.

We continue to review and to challenge our processes to deliver quality services within our overall budget.

Table 1 - Functions where more than 10 complaints (all stages) have been received in rank order – comparison

	Number of complaints (21/22)	Number of complaints (22/23)	Number of complaints (23/24)	New Ranking (previous in brackets)
Function:				
Schools	68	116	160	1 (1)
In-House Building Maintenance Team/Repairs	182	102	142	2 (3)
Waste Services	140	109	121	3 (2)
HRA (Management of Council Housing)	122	78	102	4 (4)
Roads	136	69	109	5 (5)
Revenues*	52	64	76	6 (6)
Planning	54	50	37	7 (7)
Customer Services	51	34	36	8 (8=)
Children's Services: Social Care	35	34	30	9 (8=)
Grounds Maintenance**	39	18	18	10 (12)
Public & School Transport	n/a	n/a	18	10= (n/a)
Car Parking	32	10	17	11 (14=)
Burials & Cremations**	19	10	14	12= (14=)
Environmental Health	15	16	14	12= (13)
Early Years	n/a	n/a	13	13= (n/a)
Licensing	n/a	n/a	13	13= (n/a)
Ward Management/Community Development	n/a	n/a	13	13= (n/a)
Winter Maintenance	n/a	32	13	13= (10)
Environment	n/a	n/a	11	14= (n/a)
Public Conveniences	30	28	11	14= (13)

*Taxation and Revenues were previously ranked together

**Grounds Maintenance and Burials were previously ranked together