

Agenda Item	10
Report No	AS/26/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Audit & Scrutiny**

Date: **30 November 2022**

Report Title: **Annual Complaints Performance Report – 2021/22
and Half Yearly Monitoring 2022/23**

Report By: **Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place**

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 2021 until 31 March 2022.
- 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 is summarised within the report and detailed at appendix 1.
- 1.3 Performance figures for complaint handling for Q1 and Q2 in 22/23 can be found at section 6 in the report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - Scrutinise the performance outlined in the Annual Complaints Report for 2021/22 at Appendix 1;
 - Consider the performance figures for complaints for quarter's 1 and 2 detailed at section 6;
 - Note the work undertaken to continue to improve performance in complaints handling and that this is an ongoing improvement process;
 - Agree to publish the appended report on the Council's website and submit this to the SPSO.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource Implications

There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However, the report highlights the volume of complaints, requests for service and general enquires received by the Council on an annual basis which require to be managed by services across the organisation.

3.2 Legal Implications

The Council's compliant 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 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) Implication

Analysis and learning from complaints help inform improvements in the design of our services and policies. Improving performance in contact with our citizens and customers is part of our approach to improving engagement and openness with our communities across Highland in urban and rural areas. This is a core aspect of the Redesign Board review, Connected Customers and Digitisation.

3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications

84% of complaints were received and responded to via digital channels which reduces paper usage and printing which helps contribute to reducing our carbon footprint.

3.5 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 Executive Leadership Team have arrangements in place via the central team in the Communities & Place Service, to prioritise complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and achieve statutory targets.

3.6 Gaelic Implications

There are no new implications arising from this report.

4. Background

4.1 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](#) – the key emphasis of this document is quality and customer care and how we manage our relationships with our customers and citizens.

4.2 All complaints are managed by the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team. On receipt of a complaint the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team assess it according to the MCHP.

- 4.3 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
- 4.4 Complaints can be extended at frontline to 10 working days, but only in exceptional circumstances and any which are would 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. Equally an investigation complaint can be extended past the 20-working day deadline.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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:
- Request for Service i.e., Garden Waste, Apply for Housing or Licensing
 - Report a Problem i.e., Missed Bin, Pothole or Fly-Tipping
 - General Enquiry – where there is no defined process set up to meet the request of the customer
- 4.7 In 2021/22 there were 344,948 recorded transactions in the CRM system, a jump of 82.6% on figures just prior to the pandemic. Complaints fall into the category of 'Report a Problem' and this process is governed by the SPSO set procedures and is managed by the Customer Resolution and Improvement Team (CRIT). Only 0.35% of recorded contact is considered a complaint.

5. Annual Complaints Report 2021/22

- 5.1 The Council is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to publish its Corporate Complaints Performance annually against 8 National Key Performance Indicators. **Appendix 1** covers the period 1 April 2021 until 31 March 2022.
- 5.2 There were 5.2 complaints per 1,000 of the population received during 2021/22, an increase from the 2020/21 covid period but still below pre-pandemic levels.
- 5.3 The average number of days taken to respond to frontline complaints has decreased to

5 days in 2021/22 from 8.4 days in 2020/21. These are complaints that do not require investigation. This is a considerable improvement from the average 13.3 days in 2019/20 and 25.9 days in 2016/17 and is the first time the Council has achieved this target.

- 5.4 Most complaints, **72%**, are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1) and of these **83.6%** are categorised as the outcome 'resolved' and did not require an investigation. This is a new outcome from the SPSO for 2021/22 onwards.
- 5.5 Of the complaints being considered at Stage 2, 35% were considered resolved, 36% not upheld and a further 6% upheld or 23% partially upheld. It is acknowledged there is more work to be done to improve performance on Investigation (Stage 2) complaint performance. This will remain a focus for the team, working with responsible colleagues across the Council in 2022/23. The average number of days to resolve a stage 2 complaint is 21.6 days and although this is a reduction from 28.5 days in 2016/17, the aim is to reduce this to below the target of 20 working days. Where there is a delay, we aim to ensure customers are advised of this timeously and liaise with the Service on the reasons for that delay.
- 5.6 The report in appendix 1 highlights that the Council is unable to report on indicator 7 this year, customer satisfaction with the complaint's services provided. This information was previously analysed using the Council's citizens panel survey which was not run in 2020 or 2021 due to the pandemic but is planned for the months ahead.
- 5.7 **Appendix 2** – provides a rank order of the number of complaints received by function for 2021/22 – note it is not possible due to service restructures and system changes to compare this with previous years data.

6. Quarter 1 and 2 – 2022/2023 Data

Complaints half yearly performance figures are reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee each November. The table below provides information on performance against statutory timescales –

6.1

Corporate Complaint – Q1 and 2 – 22/23

No. and % responded to within statutory timescales

	Q1		Q2	
	No.	%	No.	%
Frontline	170	60.6%	163	89.6%
Investigation	65	46.2%	53	32.1%
Escalated	38	18.4%	34	32.4%

- 6.2 Between Q1 and Q2 of this year, a change in approach was undertaken with Frontline (Stage 1) complaints. CRIT implemented a stricter validation process and tasked a member of the team who had significant frontline customer services experience with the Council to assist in improvement work with the CRIT Manager. We also worked with Services to improve complaint responses where we receive similar cases. Finally, we implemented an increased use of immediate call backs to customers, rather than email/letter writing – where it is possible and appropriate to do so. These changes have shown significant increase in performance for Frontline (Stage 1) complaints with the total corporate figure exceeding the corporate performance targets of 80% in Q2.
- 6.3 As detailed in Section 5.3, 'resolved' has been introduced as a new outcome for complaints in 20/21. The results for Q1 and Q2 suggest the continuation of the positive trend from 21/22 with 98.2% of Frontline complaints in Q1, and 96.9% in Q2 in receiving this classification where both the complaint has been resolved to the customer and the Council's satisfaction.
- 6.4 As detailed at Section 5.4, performance of investigation and escalated complaints will remain the focus in 22/23 and the Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager will continue to discuss this with each individual Service to expedite responses, understand the issues and reasons for delay, and ensure that complaint performance is given the highest priority. Further work is also required in performance reporting on cases where an approved extension has been agreed with the customer and the Council. This will provide additional insight into performance figures and will be made available to Committee in the future.
- 6.5 A further breakdown of the rank order of complaint by function for Quarter 1 and 2 are detailed in **Appendix 3**

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 The Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager is currently meeting with each Service with an overview of their complaint data for 21/22 together and with a breakdown of a revised lessons learnt approach. This is being tailored for each individual service.
- 7.2 Further training is planned for officers within Services on complaints handling and advice and guidance will be offered on how to manage this within statutory timescales. This will involve a targeted approach to those staff who provide draft responses to complaints on a regular basis.
- 7.3 A mandatory online learning course for all staff is currently under development and the intention is this can be rolled out to staff in Q4 of this financial year as part of the new training platform.

- 7.4 A new system for reviewing complaints has been introduced which sees performance scrutinised on a weekly basis by the Executive Leadership Team at the Performance Governance Board. This recognises the importance of complaint handling across the organisation and ensures a continuous improvement approach is taken to the handling of complaints.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place

Date: 21 October 2022

Author: Angela Morrison, Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager

Annual Complaints Performance Report 2021/2022

Valuing Customer Feedback

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

Ambitious Sustainable Connected

Contents

Executive Summary	Page 3
Report Headlines	Page 4
Looking Forward into 2022/23	Page 5
Background	Page 6
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Annual Performance Indicators 1-7	Page 7-15
Compliments	Page 16
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Annual Performance Indicator 8	Page 17
Complaints investigated by Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	Page 18
Conclusion	Page 19

Executive Summary

The Council's published 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 Councils corporate complaints performance in 2021/22, 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 - Executive Chief Officer – Communities & Place

Report Headlines

Citizens' preference for making a complaint continues to be to self-serve through the Council's website, however this has fallen from 69% to 50% due to the publication of a direct email address for complaint handling (complaints@highland.gov.uk). When combined with email channel, **84% of complaints are received via a digital channel**, an increase of 1% on 2020/21. Citizens who engage with us online are linked directly to the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, further enhancing the first contact resolution.

Most complaints (**72%**) are categorised as Frontline (Stage 1) and of those, **83.6%** have been categorised as resolved 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 has decreased to **5 days in 2021/22** from 8.4 days in 2020/21. 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 improved to **61.9%**, an increase of **7.8%** on the comparative period in 2020/2021. There has been a decrease in Investigation performance to **55.7%** (a decrease of **13%**) 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), in 2021/22, 38.1% of frontline complaints were not concluded in 5 days and 44.3% Escalated/Investigation complaints were not investigated in the 20-day target. This will remain a focus for the team, working with responsible colleagues across the Council, in 2022/23.

Looking Forward into 2022/23

Following the successful implementation of the revised Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), [Model Complaints Handling Procedure \(MCHP\)](#) in April 2021, the focus for the Council in 2022/23 will be to further embed the guidance with training and additional support to all Services within the Council.

Training will be delivered via online modules, face to face training with teams, and toolbox talks on how to manage, direct and support staff in identifying, and progressing a complaint, this will include how to provide on the spot remedies and address the issue directly (where possible) to de-escalate the issue. For the more complex Stage 2 complaints process, further training and guidance will be provided to officers in the methods of investigating and responding to cases where there are detailed history, or multiple services involved.

The Customer Resolution & Improvement Team will work to refine all their processes to ensure a more streamlined approach for customers and staff, in particular working with Services to examine the lessons that can be learnt from every complaint. In emerging from the pandemic, the ways in which customers wish to contact the Council have changed and the Council's Redesign Board has recently agreed a new area of work – Connected Customers and Digitisation – which will focus on how to improve the way customers contact the Council and ensure we meet customers' expectations/demand within the resources available to the Council.

Overdue complaints are reported to the Executive Leadership Team each week and in 2022 they will also be reported to the Performance Governance Board, chaired by the Depute Chief Executive. In addition, quarterly reports on corporate and service performance will be submitted, which comprise all members of the Executive Leadership Team. The key focus will be a renewed emphasis on timescale, quality, lessons learnt, and improvements. This information will be made available to our staff and customers.

Background

Customer enquiries, requests for service and complaints are recorded on our customer relationship management system. For context there were 344,948 transactions in 2021/22 of which 1,217 (0.35%) were customer complaints. Compared to 2019/20, just prior to the pandemic, this accounts for an increase in recorded customer contact of 82.6% (156,081 transactions) and a decrease in the percentage which were complaints from 1% to 0.35%. During the pandemic the forms available to our customers on the Council's website increased substantially which accounts for the significant volume increase in contact.

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 assess in accordance the appropriate stage according to the nature of the complaint – 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 2021/2022.

Note: Due to COVID-19 the Local Authority Complaint Handlers Network (LACHN) has been unable to collate Scottish Local Authority national average data for 2020/21 and 21/22

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 2021 to 31 March 2022 per 1,000 population.

For Highland there were 5.2 complaints logged per 1,000 of population during 2021/22, an increase in the number from 2020/21 and continuing to rise towards pre-pandemic levels.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Population Estimate	234,770	235,180	235,540	235,830	235,430
Complaints Per 1,000	9.3	6.1	7.3	4.4	5.2

The Council validated a total of **1,217** complaints in 21/22, an increase of 16% from figures in 20/21 (1,048 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.

Citizens' preference for making a complaint continues to be self-serve through the Council's website, however has fallen from 69% to 50% due to the publication of a direct email address for complaint handling (complaints@highland.gov.uk). When combined with email channel, **84% of complaints are received via a digital channel**, and increase of 1% on 20/21. Citizens who engage with us online are linked directly to the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, further enhancing the first contact resolution.

Citizens who choose to engage digitally with the Council's complaints process receive email responses, which provides quicker delivery timescales than traditional methods.

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
Closed at Frontline	90.6	82.7	73.7	72.0	67.9
Closed at Investigation	5.9	12.6	22.7	24.6	17.1
Closed after progression from Frontline to Investigation or where the Frontline timescale has expired	3.5	4.7	3.5	3.4	14.9

There were **1,185 complaints closed** during 2021/22, 805 (69.7%) at Frontline, 203 (17.1%) at investigation and 177 (14.9%) after progression from frontline to investigation. Most of our complaints are received and resolved at frontline; however, there has been a noticeable increase in escalated complaints either because the customer wishes to escalate to the next stage, or where the frontline response time has been exhausted. 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.

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.

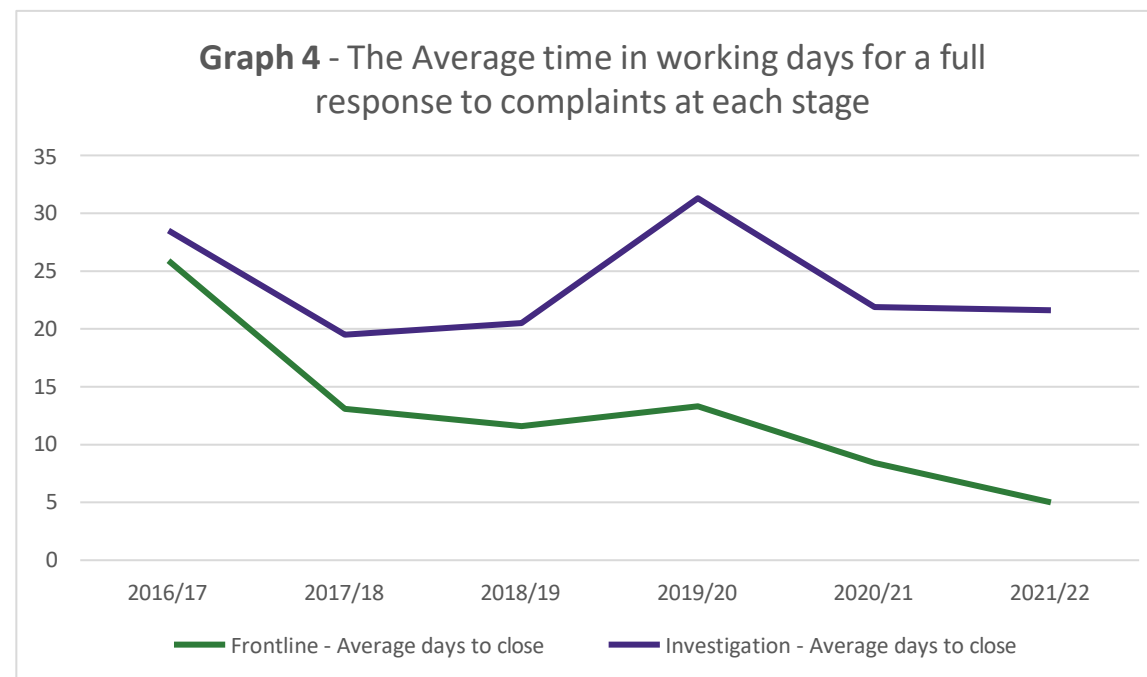
Given the significant number of cases classified with this new category and to ensure accuracy, a review was undertaken of those cases closed as 'resolved' but where it was subsequently reopened (i.e. not resolved) – out of all complaints in 21/22 this accounted for 24 cases, and we can be confident this classification is being used accurately by the team. We will continue to monitor this to ensure accuracy in the future.

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%)
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%)

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 5 days in 2021/22**. The average number of days taken to respond to **Investigation** complaints has **reduced from 28.5 days in 2016/17 to 21.6 days in 2021/22**, continuing the notable decline from 19/20, and showcases the direct benefit of the introduction of the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team at the end of 2020.



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

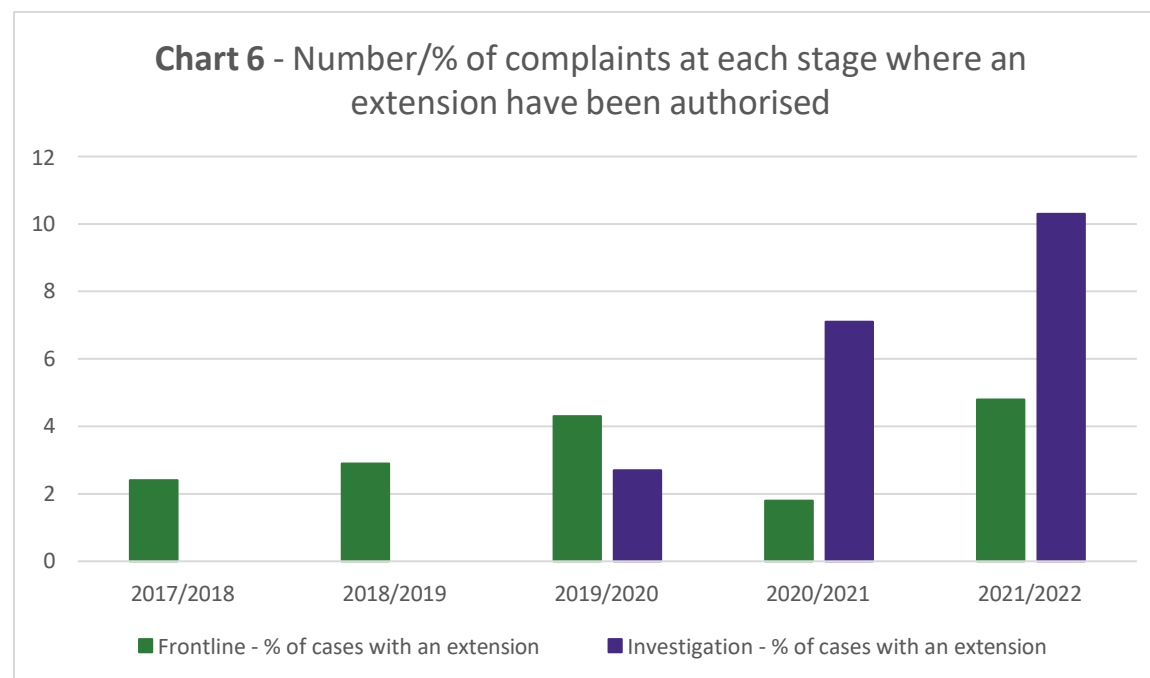
This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days, including cases where an extension to the timescales has been agreed.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number closed at Frontline Resolution	802	502	597	399	498
% within 5 working days	(42.6%)	(45.4%)	(49.5%)	(54.1%)	(61.9%)
Number closed at Investigation	78	109	234	173	113
% within 20 working days	(63.8%)	(64.7%)	(63.1%)	(68.7%)	(55.7%)
Number closed at Escalation	55	39	40	35	78
% within 20 working days	(75.3%)	(61.9%)	(69.0%)	(85.7%)	(44.1%)

Council performance on the number of frontline complaints managed within the 5 working day target set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has improved to **61.9%**, an increase of **7.8%** on the comparative period in 2019/20 and **7.8%** increase from 2020/21 which continues a steady increase in performance. There has been a decrease in investigation performance to **55.7%** (a decrease of **13%**) where the SPSO target is 20 working days. Analysis would suggest this is due to several interlinked reasons which include the complexity of many of the cases received, staff absences within wider services teams and Customer Resolution team, particularly in Q3 and 4 of 21/22 and additional areas of work due to Covid -19. Where a case is overdue the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team ensure contact is maintained with the customer to keep them up to date on the reasons for delay and when they should expect a response.

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.

39 (4.8%) frontline complaints (13 during 2020/2021) were authorised with a 5-day extension. 21 (10.3%) investigation complaints were authorised with an extension up to 20 working days. With agreement from the customer, we can apply an extension when it is deemed necessary due to the complexity of the issue.



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 (and correct application) of approved extensions in the last two financial years.

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 ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the survey has not been run since 2019. A new approach to delivering the next Performance Survey has been developed during 2022 and a new survey is planning during 2022/23. Customer Satisfaction data will be provided in the next annual report.

.

Compliments Received

During 21/22 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.

- *"I would like to say thank you for the work completed on the shower today - very pleased with the work and professionalism of the tradespeople who attended"* – **Property and Housing Service**
- *"I spoke to a member of your staff who answered my call today regarding a housing repair. She was extremely polite and friendly on the phone, was quick to take ownership of the issue and phoned me back with a solution within the timescale she said – 5 star service!"* – **Customer Services (Service Centre)**
- *"My wife and I recently visited a grave on the West Coast. Because of covid restrictions we were slightly concerned as to what condition it might be in given that you also have been restricted in what you could do over the last few months. We need not have worried however because the cemetery was in lovely condition with cut grass having been taken away and tidying up had clearly also taken place round headstones. Could you please pass on our grateful thanks to the staff concerned?"* – **EH & Burials (C&P)**
- *"We met one of your operatives picking litter recently. The young lady was enthusiastic, personable, informative and an absolute credit to you. She completed her task whilst chatting to us and it was a pleasure to meet someone so committed and upbeat".* – **Waste Management (C&P)**
- *"I have just spoken to a member of staff at your call centre and I would like to pass on my thanks and gratitude for the service and help they provided. An excellent service, very thorough and very friendly. Please pass on my thanks"* – **Customer Services (Service Centre) (C&P)**
- *"Customer called to ask to pass on thanks and compliments to the roads department for their hard work, she advised the roads department have been absolutely brilliant* – **Infrastructure & Roads (IEE)**
- *"I would like to pass on my thanks to the Business Support Team Leader who I have been in contact with on a matter I have been trying to resolve without success. This member of staff was friendly and professional during our telephone conversation and has followed up on her promise to help. Please pass on my thanks for the exceptional level of service she provided"* – **Revenues & Business Support (C&P)**
- *"I received a replacement refuse bin after contacting the Council to inform them my existing bin was damaged. My concern was dealt with very quickly, within 3 days of reporting the problem. A gentleman arrived at my house today and made his way into the garden without disturbing anyone in the house and exchanged bins, even taking away the half full bin of rubbish! I was extremely impressed with the service; he was very respectful of the property. It may seem like a very small thing, replacing a bin, but I am very happy with the service provided".* – **Waste Management**

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

During 21/22 work has focused on a number of areas -

- Continued engagement with Service Management Teams
- Engagement with the Web and User Experience team to deliver new processes within the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system
- Consolidation of new corporate complaints process
- Targeted engagement with sections of the Council receiving the most complaints
- Targeted complaints training to services – including bespoke training delivered for new and newly promoted Head Teachers
- Movement to task-based (corporate) workload in the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, rather than Service based
- 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
- Delivery of presentation by the Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager to the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network on the work to date and implementation of a corporate/central team to manage complaints
- Liaison with the Web and User Experience team to deliver renewed reporting capabilities

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 will be presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in November 2022 by the Performance and Governance Service.

Conclusion

Citizens and Customers are at the centre of our 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.

This report demonstrates how we are continuously improving our performance and are actively looking to make significant changes to the way in which the Council manages complaints. This includes supporting a learning culture in the organisation where we use the rich data we are provided by our customers for improvement.

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.

While the Council and citizens experienced considerable disruption arising from the response to Covid, we use this framework to assess how our organisation manages complaints, how accessible our complaints procedure is and the effectiveness of our governance and monitoring arrangements. We continue to review and to challenge our processes to deliver quality services within our overall budget.

If you have any queries relating to the work of the Customer Resolution & Improvement Team, please contact:

Angela Morrison

Customer Resolution & Improvement Manager

Email: angela.morrison@highland.gov.uk

Appendix 2

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

	Number 20/21	New Ranking
FUNCTION		
In-House Building Maintenance Team/Repairs	182	1
Waste Services	140	2
Roads	136	3
HRA (Management of Council Housing)	122	4
Schools	68	5
Planning	54	6
Taxation*	53	7
Revenues	52	8
Customer Services	51	9
Grounds Maintenance**	39	10
Children's Services: Social Care	35	11
Car Parking	32	12
Public Conveniences	30	13
Burials & Cremations	19	14
Property Maintenance	15	15
Environmental Health	15	16
E&L – Additional Support for Learning	13	17
Homelessness	12	18

*Taxation and Revenues were previously ranked together

**Grounds Maintenance and Burials were previously ranked together

Appendix 3 – Q1 and 2 – 21/22 Data

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

	Number 20/21 Q1 & 2	Number 21/22 Q1 & 2	New Ranking (previous in brackets)
FUNCTION			
Waste Management/Waste Strategy	93	74	1 (1)
Schools*	-	59	2 (n/a)
In House Building Maintenance	63	55	3 (4)
Revenues	25	47	4 (7)
Roads	84	45	5 (2)
HRA (Management of Council Housing)	65	41	6 (3)
Planning	24	30	7 (8)
Customer Services	16	29	8 (11)
Children's Services – Social Care	15	20	9 (12)
Public Conveniences	22	21	10 (10)
Grounds Maintenance	27	16	11 (6)
Car Parking	23	11	12 (9)

*In 21/22 Schools complaints now include 3 separate classifications, which combine into a new total. This figure is not comparable to 20/21 data.