



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Complaints Handling Procedure
Annual Report 2024/25

Complaints Procedure

We regard a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf. We take all complaints seriously. Our staff are trained in handling complaints and in focusing where possible on resolution at the first point of contact.

The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, (the Act) gave the SPSO the authority to lead the development of model complaint handling procedures across the public sector. The Act took forward the recommendations of the Sinclair Report which sought to improve how complaints were handled through the development of simplified, standardised Complaint Handling Procedures.

This local authority Complaint Handling Procedure (CHP) has now been in place within the Comhairle for a number of years. It has provided a standardised approach to dealing with customers complaints across the local authority sector and has improved the Comhairle's capacity to scrutinise its approach to complaints and also to benchmark with similar authorities.

The CHP has standardised the definition of complaints; the number of stages; the timescales associated with each stage; and the requirement to record, report and publicise complaints information. This standardised approach, supported by in-house training has built awareness of how to manage complaints effectively for the benefit of both the complainant and the Comhairle. The CHP has provided customers with a consistent approach to complaints which has made it simpler to submit a complaint. This has promoted a customer focused approach and encouraged services to learn from complaints.

The SPSO has developed a revised Complaints Handling Procedure which fully incorporates Social Work Complaints into the local authority procedure. This procedure was implemented by the Comhairle on 1 April 2021.

Following the introduction of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC)(Incorporation)(Scotland) Act 2024 the SPSO developed the Child Friendly Complaints Handling Principles and Child Friendly Complaints Handling Process Guidance which were both adopted by the Comhairle in July 2024.

Our Complaints Handling Procedure has two stages:

Stage 1

We always try to resolve complaints quickly, and at Stage One within five working days. These complaints are often resolved by front line staff and service managers who know and understand their service well and are able to put things right quickly.

Stage 2

If customers are dissatisfied with our response at Stage One, they can escalate their complaint to Stage Two. We also escalate some complaints immediately to stage two if it is clear that they are complex and will require a detailed investigation. We aim to acknowledge all Stage Two complaints within three working days and provide a response to customers within twenty working days unless there is clearly a good reason for needing additional time to investigate. If more time is required, we will aim to communicate this with the complainant and get their agreement to an extension. Where customers are dissatisfied with our decision regarding a Stage Two complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider it. We provide the details for the SPSO in all our Stage Two decision letters.

Our Performance

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has provided local authorities with a number of performance indicators for councils to use when monitoring the performance, compliance and effectiveness of their complaint's procedure.

The Comhairle publicly reports complaints information quarterly on its website and is required to complete an annual report.

The Comhairle's closure of stage 1 complaints within the allocated timeframe was 55% of stage one complaints closed within five working days, which is a significant drop from the previous year. Performance for the closure of Stage 2 complaints has also reduced from 2023/24 with 20% of stage two complaints closed within 20 working days with more work required to bring results into a consistent upward trajectory.

Further analysis of the reasons behind the number of stage two complaints closed within the allocated timeframe reveals that in addition to the 4 stage two complaints that were closed within 20 working days, a further 6 complaints had an extension to the timeframe authorised.

The following sections provide detailed information on our performance against these indicators.

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

There were 1.58 complaints logged per thousand of population in 2024/25. This is a calculation of the total number of complaints received (42) divided by the population estimate (26,640) and multiplied by 1,000.

There were 1.76 complaints logged per thousand of population in 2023/24.

Indicator 2 – Complaints closed at stage one and stage two as a percentage of all complaints closed.

There were 42 complaints closed, 22 (52%) at Stage One and 18 (43%) at Stage Two and 2 (5%) were closed after escalation.

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

Stage One:

7 (31.5%) Upheld
3 (14%) Partially Upheld
7 (31.5%) Not Upheld
5 (23%) Resolved

Stage Two:

10 (56%) Upheld
3 (16.5%) Partially Upheld
3 (16.5%) Not Upheld
2 (11%) Resolved

Escalated from stage one:

1 (50%) Partially Upheld
1 (50%) No Upheld

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

The total time in working days to respond to Stage One complaints was 154 days. This worked out at an average time of 7 working days for responding to a Stage One complaint.

The total time in working days to respond to Stage Two complaints was 954 days. This worked out at an average time of 48 working days for responding to a Stage Two complaint.

Dealing with complaints took up 1108 working days of Comhairle staff time in 2024/25 which is clearly significant. This time has increased from the 730 working days spent dealing with complaints in 2023/24 and back to similar levels of 22/23.

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

12 (55%) of Stage One complaints were closed within 5 working days.

3 (17%) of Stage Two complaints were closed within 20 working days.

1 (50%) of complaints escalated from stage one were closed within 20 working days.

Indicator 6 - The number and percentage of complaints at each stage where an extension has been authorised.

There were 6 complaints (30%) closed at Stage Two which had been recorded on the system with an authorised extension.

Indicator 7- Customer satisfaction survey

The Comhairle recognises that it is best practice to engage with customers who have made a complaint and to seek their views on the complaints process. The Comhairle has a Customer Satisfaction Survey which is sent out to all customers who use the Comhairle's Complaints Procedure.

Despite promotion of the complaints survey, analysis for 2024/25 shows that there continues to be a low uptake of the online survey and no returns have been received in the past year.

Learning from Complaints

Learning from complaints is an important tool to improve customer satisfaction but also for improving business efficiency by getting it right first time.

Looking at learning from the complaints highlights that communication continues to be at the heart of many complaints that are received. Emphasis will continue to be placed on the need for good communication with service users. Improved recording of lessons learned and how they are implemented has been improved as a result of previous reviews on Complaint issues.

To support performance improvement, Complaint Handling Officers will again receive a briefing regarding the requirement to meet the 5-day response requirements for stage 1 complaints and 20-working day deadline when managing a Stage 2 complaint and to seek authorisation for any extensions to this requirement. Service managers will also be encouraged to undertake periodical reviews of policies and procedures to ensure they are up to date and reflective of current issues.

Total number of complaints being received continue on a downward trajectory, indicating the effectiveness of updated communication procedures and shared learning across the organisation.

Please note that this data may be subject to change following end of year quality assurance analysis