



AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

19 JUNE 2025

COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to inform the Comhairle of the publication of the Complaints Annual Report for 2024/25.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle is required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to complete and publish an annual report on complaints handling and performance. Data related to annual performance is also submitted to the Local Authority Complaints Handling Network (LACHN) Family Group 1 for benchmarking purposes.
- 2.2 The Complaints Annual Report 2024/25, at Appendix 1, will be made available on the Comhairle's webpage. A total of 42 complaints were closed in 2024/25: 22 at Stage 1, 18 at Stage 2 and a further 2 following escalation from stage 1.
- 2.3 The Comhairle's performance in 2024/25, for closing stage 1 complaints within five working days has reduced from last year's performance to 55%. Closure of stage 2 complaints within the allotted 20 working days has also decreased to 20%. In 2023/24 the percentages were 89% and 31.5% respectively. The Comhairle will reissue briefings regarding the need to meet the required working day response timescales when managing complaints, highlighting the importance of seeking and recording of formal authorisation to extend the timescales when necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Complaints Annual Report 2024/25.**

Contact Officers: Charlene Macmillan, Strategy Officer
Appendix 1: Annual Complaints Report 2024/25

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	Regulatory requirement for publication of local authority complaints data.
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Reputational risk if the Comhairle does not meet its targets for closure of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints within allocated timescales.
Equalities	The revised Complaints Handling Procedure includes additional equality and accessibility support for people who are vulnerable and child friendly complaints process.
Corporate Strategy	Consistent, fair and reasonable complaints handling procedures contribute to the strategic priority of being a sustainable and inclusive council.
Environmental Impact	None.
Consultation	There is no consultation required for the Report. The Annual Report is published on the Comhairle's webpage.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The SPSO in collaboration with local government complaint handling experts has established a robust Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). This model has continued to evolve, and the latest version was approved in March 2021 and introduced on 1 April 2021.
- 5.2 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.

COMPLAINTS

- 6.1 The Complaints Annual Report, 2024/25, has been drafted by collating data that has been monitored and reported quarterly. This data, once verified, is benchmarked annually across Scotland. Benchmarking has still to be undertaken for 2024/25 data.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 7.1 Looking at learning from the complaints the reoccurring theme still appears to be communication and also the application of consistent processes and policies which is at the heart of the issues being raised. Four actions have been identified:
- All Complaint Handling Officers will receive a briefing regarding the requirement to meet the 5-day working deadline when dealing with a Stage 1 complaint and the 20-working day deadline when managing a Stage 2 complaint. Officers will be reminded of the requirement to seek necessary authorisations to extend this timescale if required, and to ensure it is done in liaison with the complainant.
 - Emphasis will continue to be placed on the need for good communication with service users at all

times

- Regular review of policies and procedures will be undertaken to ensure they are up-to-date and reflective of pertinent issues, with staff fully briefed on updates.
- Officers will be actively engaged with to discuss particular challenges that they are facing in responding within the timescales to determine if process can be streamlined and mitigations put in place.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Comhairle's complaints procedure is robust, and performance is reported quarterly on the Comhairle's website. Response performance decreased in 2024/25 across both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints, and this is addressed in the lessons learned section of the Annual Report. The number of complaints received has reduced in recent years, though some have become more complex, requiring further investigation.