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## Chief Executive's Foreword

I am pleased to present Argyll and Bute Council's Annual Complaints Report, which provides information about our performance in handling complaints from our customers between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.



Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing high quality services for residents, businesses and visitors in our area. We strive to be thorough, transparent, objective and fair in our approach to complaints, and to make it as easy as possible for customers to access our complaints procedure through our website, by email, over the telephone or in person.

I understand it can be disappointing and frustrating when your expectations are not met. We welcome and value complaints and feedback from our customers as it allows us to continue to improve service delivery. Some examples of those improvements made are included within this report.

Following the Covid pandemic, our customers and employees have adjusted to different ways of doing things and different working environments. During this time, I have received many messages of praise towards our services and employees and I am pleased to share some of these messages within this report.

It has been a challenging year and I thank all the staff in my organisation for doing what they do best and going the extra distance to provide the best possible services and support to the people of Argyll and Bute.

Pippa Milne  
Chief Executive – Argyll and Bute Council

## Introduction

Argyll and Bute Council, along with all other Scottish Local Authorities, follow a model complaints handling procedure which is determined by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO). This report presents how Argyll and Bute Council has performed against eight key performance indicators set by the SPSO that are used by all 32 local authorities, and provides some details about improvements to our services, along with some positive feedback from our customers.

## Complaints process

Complaints can be either Stage 1, which are usually straightforward issues and must be dealt within 5 days or less, or Stage 2, which are usually about more complex or serious issues and can take up to 20 days for a response to be provided. If a customer is not happy with a Stage 2 response, they can refer their complaint on to the SPSO, who will look at the issues raised and can investigate the matter.

Stage 1 → Stage 2 → SPSO

### What is a complaint?

A complaint is 'an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council'.

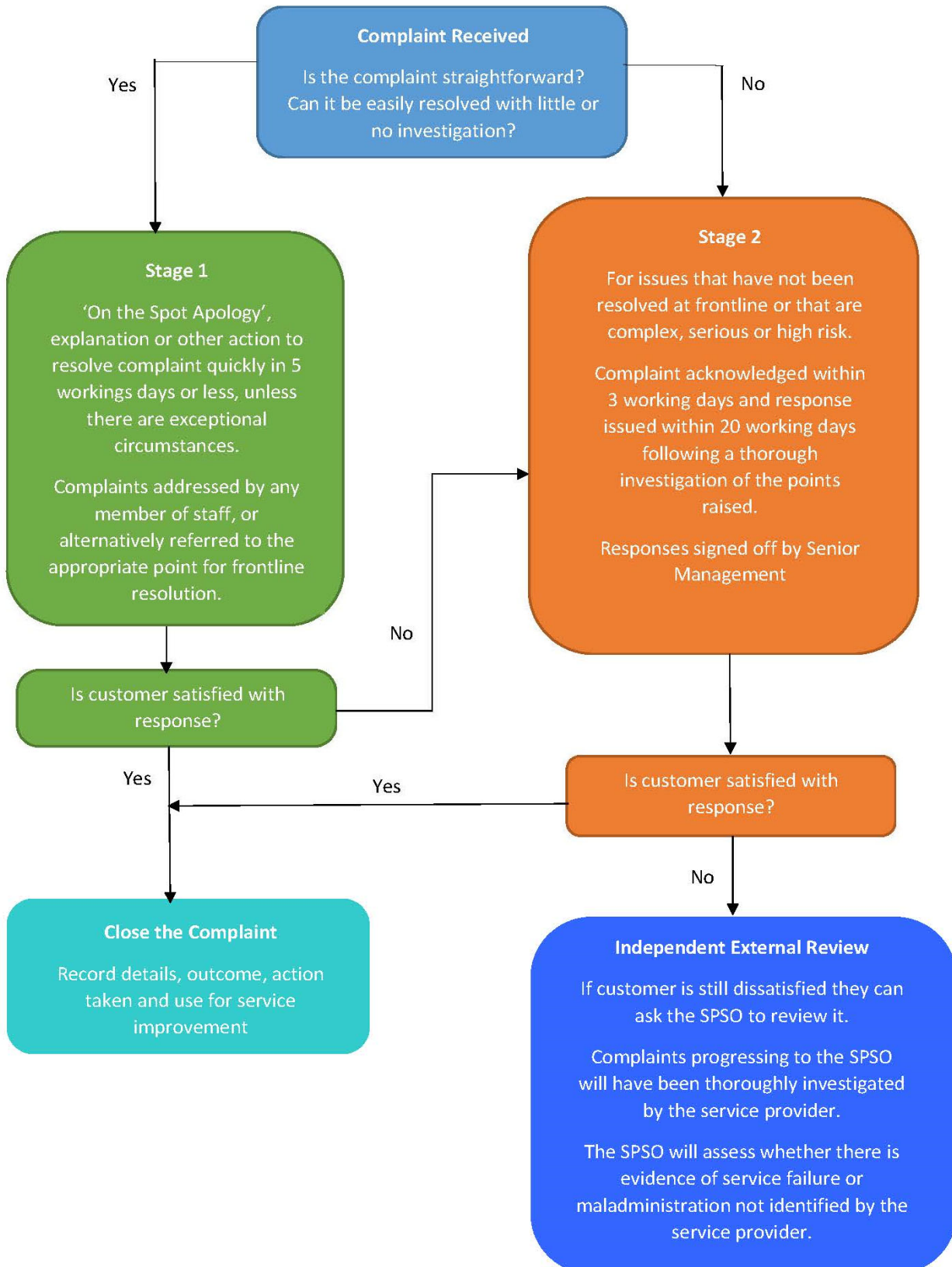
In most cases, a complaint will be made because the customer considers that the Council has:

- Done something wrong
- Failed to live up to expectations
- Treated someone badly or unfairly

The process map on the following page outlines our process.

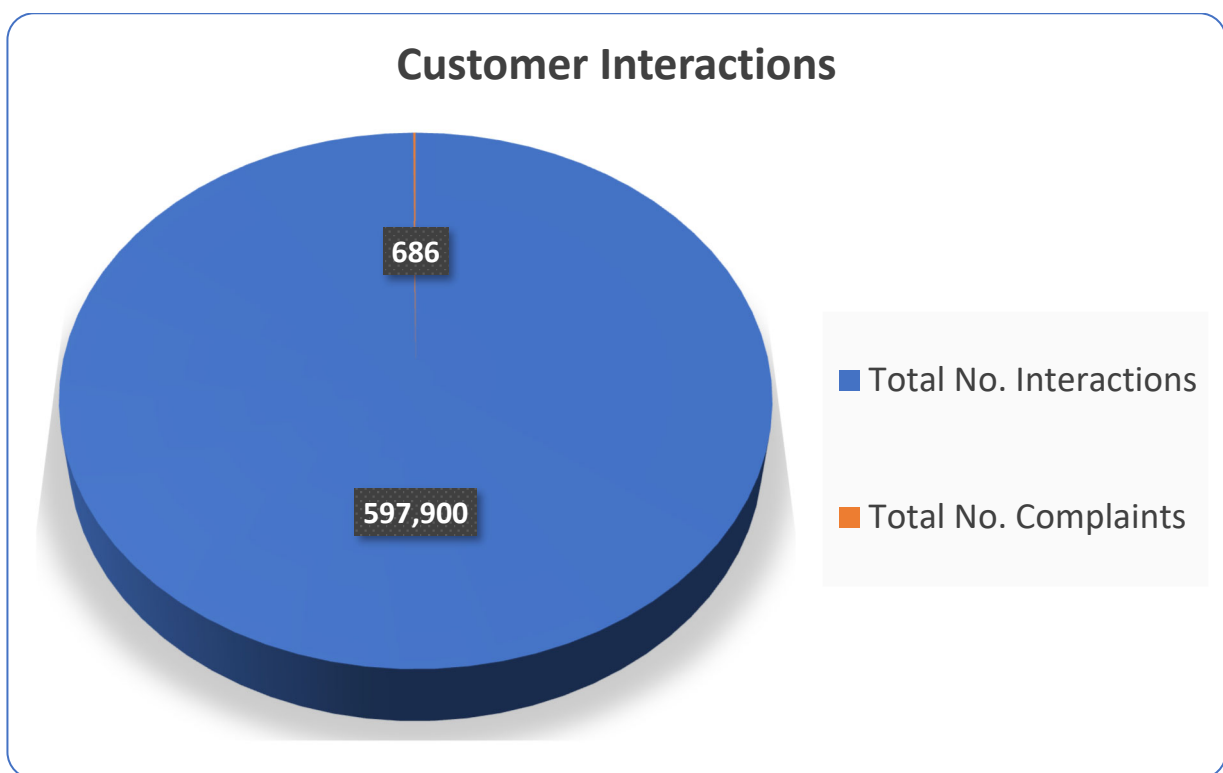


## Complaints Process



## CUSTOMER CONTACT

Argyll and Bute Council has many interactions with customers every day through various channels including email, telephone and through our website. Complaints from customers only form a very small number of the interactions that are logged through our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. In 2022/23 Argyll and Bute Council logged 597,900 incidents through the CRM system. Of these 597,900 incidents, only 686 of these were complaints. This equates to 0.11% as shown below.



## INDICATOR 1 – COMPLAINTS RECEIVED PER 1,000 OF POPULATION

This section details the total number of complaints handled by Argyll and Bute Council between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. To allow a fair comparison to be made across all 32 Scottish councils, this indicator looks at the figure of “complaints per 1,000 of population”.

In 2022/2023 Argyll and Bute received, processed and closed

**686**  
complaints.

The population of Argyll and Bute is estimated at around

**86,220**



This means there were **8.0 complaints per 1,000 population**, or roughly **1 resident in 126** made a complaint about our services. A comparison of this indicator over the past 3 years is shown in the table below.

Year	No. of Complaints	Complaints Per 1,000 Population
2022/23	686	8.0
2021/22	700	8.2
2020/21	407	4.7





## INDICATOR 2 – NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS

This indicator provides information about the number of complaints closed at Stages 1 and 2, and the escalated complaints (when a customer is not satisfied with a stage 1 response, and it goes on to be dealt with as stage 2).

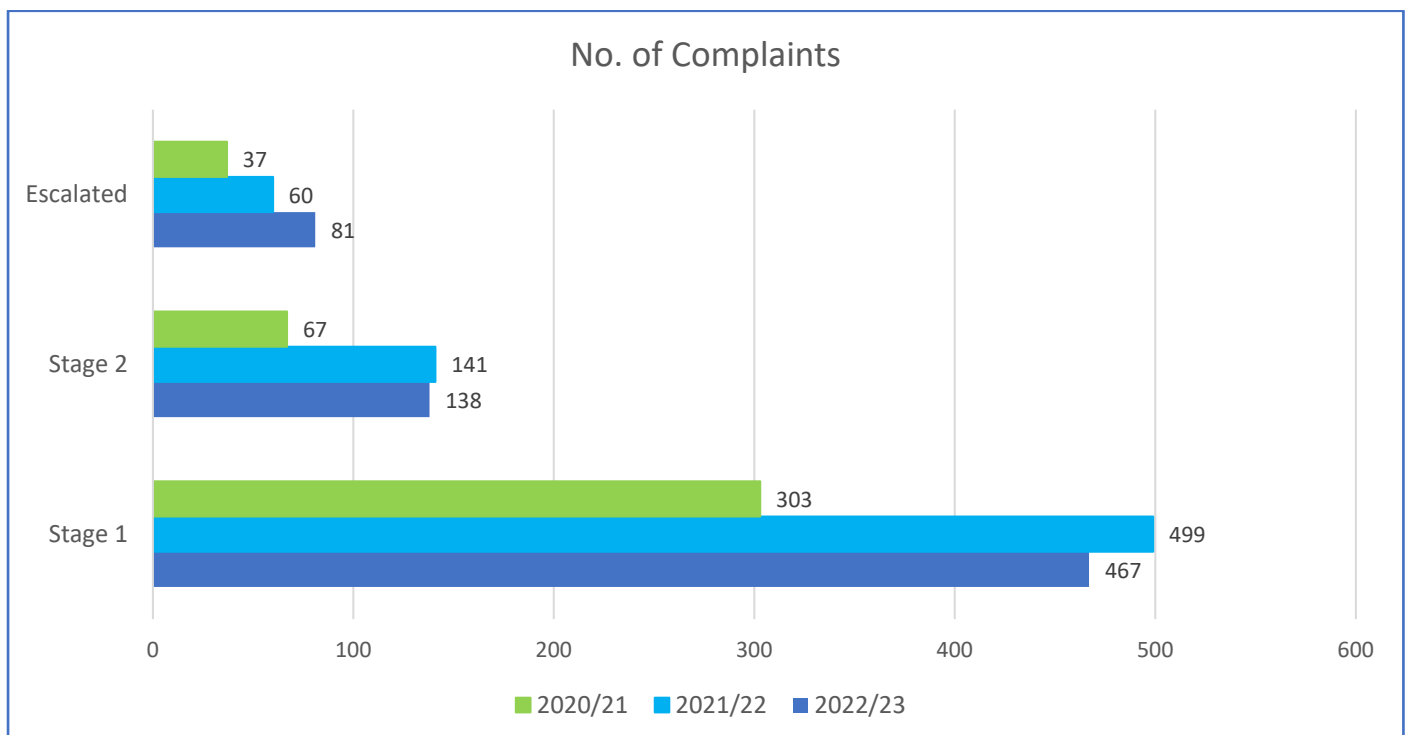
467 complaints were closed at Stage 1 – 68%

138 complaints were closed at Stage 2 – 20%

81 complaints were closed after escalation – 12%

14 complaints were not closed at Stage 1 within 10 days and were escalated to Stage 2

The graph below shows a comparison between the number of complaints received at each stage over the past 3 years.



## INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES STAGE 1

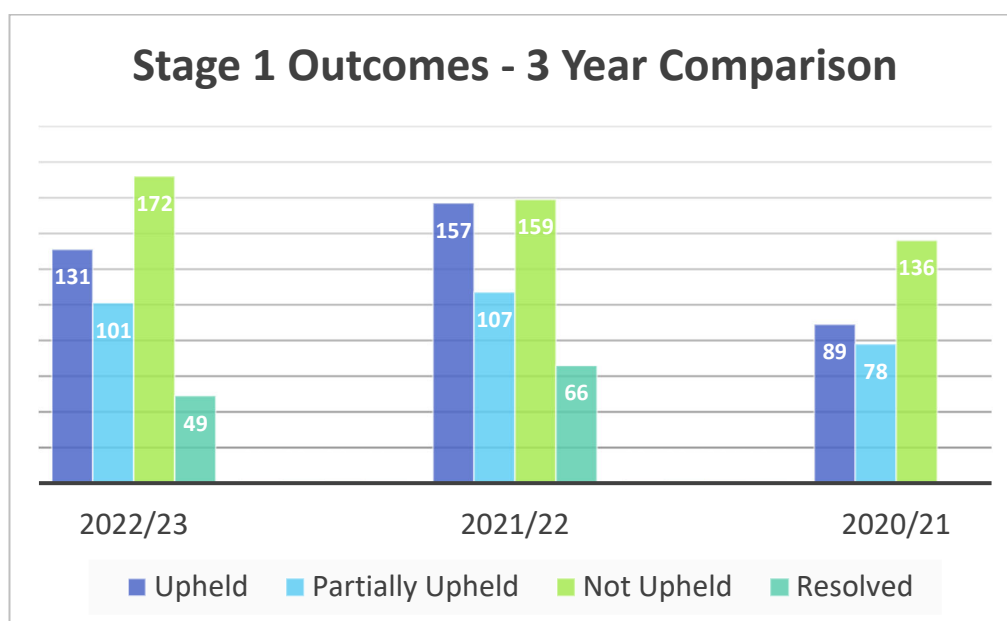
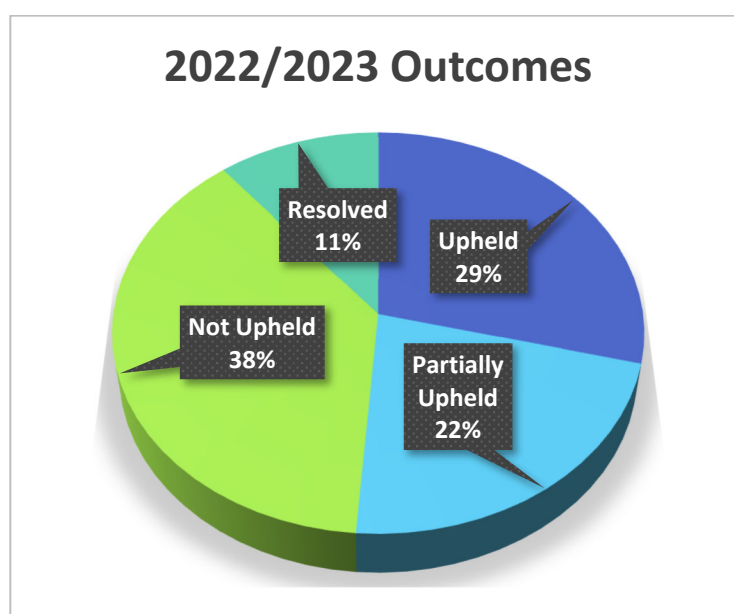
With every complaint, we contact the customer and explain what the outcome of their complaint was — Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld — and provide details about how this decision was made. The charts below provide a comparison of the outcomes for this year, and over the past 3 years. The “resolved” outcome was introduced with the new complaints handling procedure in April 2021, and is used when positive action can be taken to resolve the issue for the customer.

131 complaints were Upheld at Stage 1 – 29%

101 complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 1 – 22%

172 complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 1 – 38%

49 complaints were Resolved at Stage 1 – 11%



\*Resolved outcome not relevant to 2020/21 data

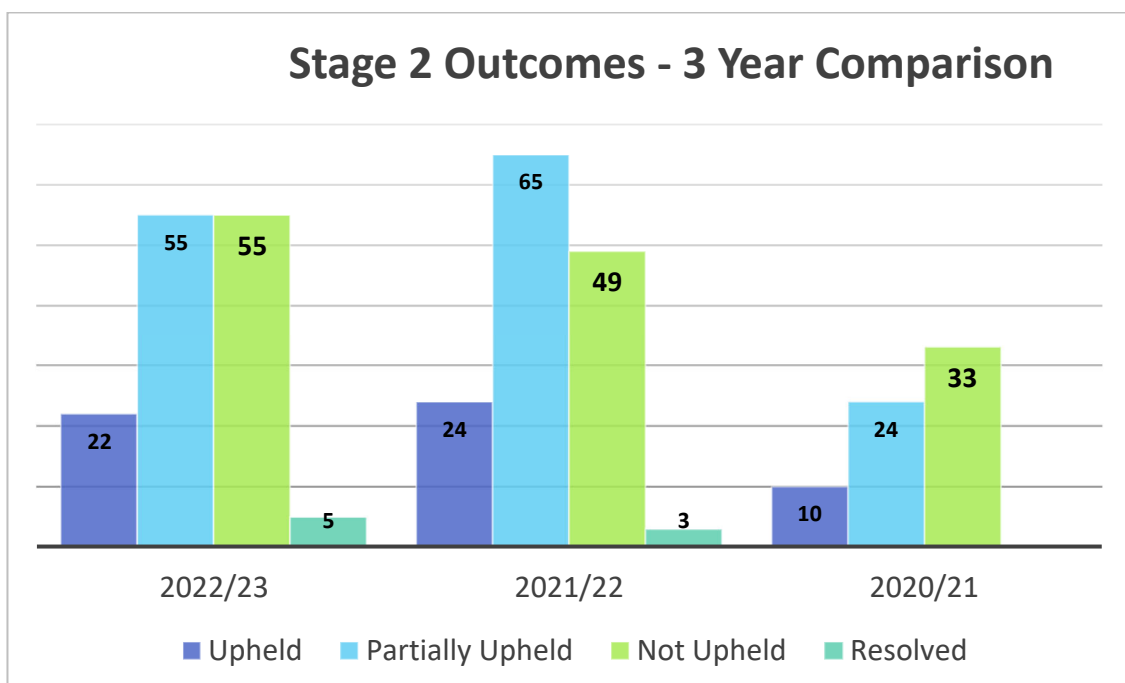
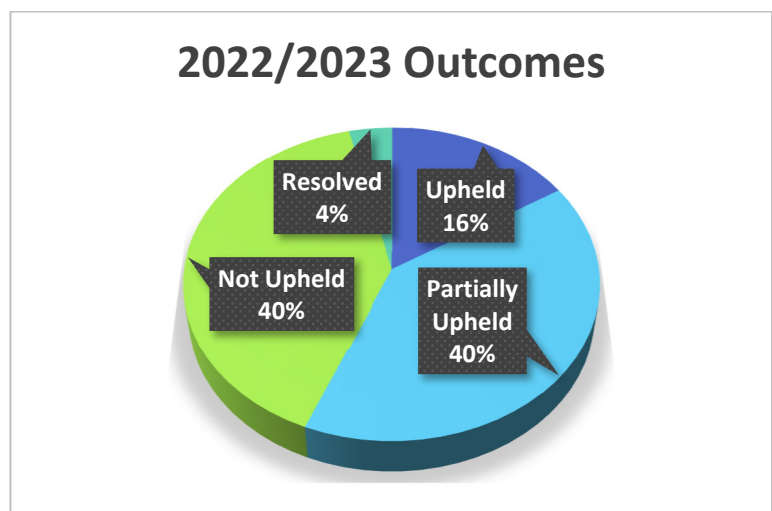
## INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES STAGE 2

22 Complaints were Upheld at Stage 2 – 16%

55 Complaints were Partially Upheld at Stage 2 – 40%

55 Complaints were Not Upheld at Stage 2 – 40%

5 Complaints were Resolved at Stage 2 – 4%



\*Resolved outcome not relevant to 2020/21 data

## INDICATOR 3 – COMPLAINT OUTCOMES ESCALATED COMPLAINTS

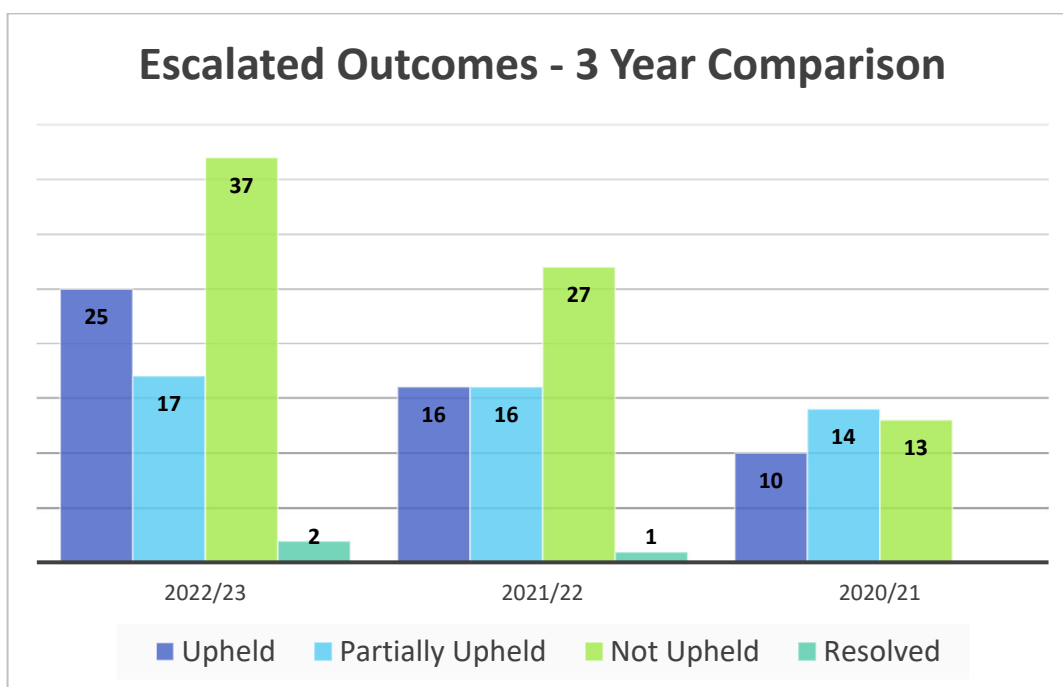
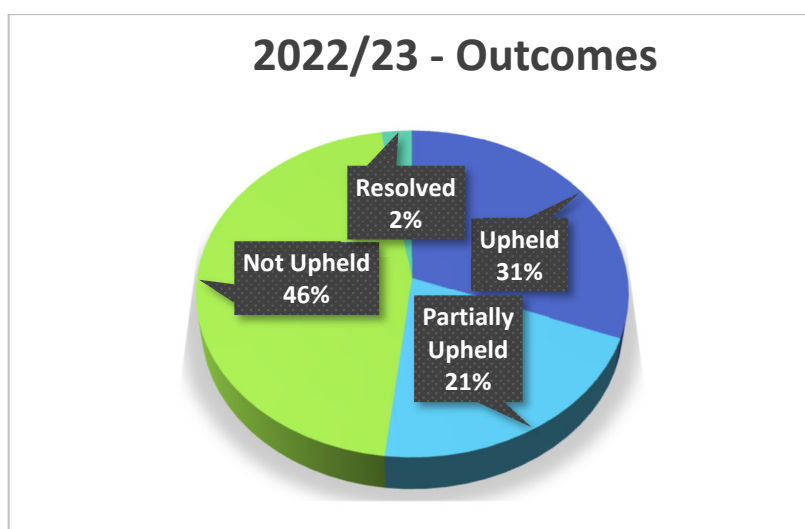
When a customer is not happy with a Stage 1 response, it is dealt with as a Stage 2 complaint — these are known as “Escalated Complaints”.

25 complaints were Upheld after escalation - 31%

17 complaints were Partially Upheld after escalation – 21%

37 complaints were Not Upheld after escalation – 46%

2 complaint was Resolved after escalation – 2%



\*Resolved outcome not relevant to 2020/21 data

## INDICATOR 4 – AVERAGE TIMES

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2022/2023, we closed **453** complaints at Stage 1, with a total sum of **1,995 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 1 complaint was **4.4 working days**.

The figures for the last 3 years can be seen in the table below.

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2022/23	453	1,995	4.4
2021/22	489	1,999	4.1
2020/21	303	1491	4.9

**Stage 2** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2022/2023, we closed **137** complaints at Stage 2, with a total sum of **2,367 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was **17.3 working days**.

The figures for the last 3 years can be seen in the table below.

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2022/23	137	2367	17.3
2021/22	141	3,107	22
2020/21	67	1289	19.2

Monthly performance reporting is provided to all Heads of Service, Directors and Complaints Officers to allow them to take action with their Services if required.

### Indicator 4 – Average Times

**After Escalation** – in 2022/2023, we closed **81** escalated complaints after Escalation, with a total sum of **1671 working days**. Our average time to close a complaint after Escalation was **20.6 working days**.

The last three year's results can be seen below.

Year	No. of Complaints Closed	Total Days	Average Time (days)
2022/23	81	1671	20.6
2021/22	60	954	15.9
2020/21	37	604	16.3



## INDICATOR 5 – PERFORMANCE AGAINST TIMESCALES

**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2022/2023, we closed **453** complaints at Stage 1 with **370** of these within timescale, or **82%**. **23 (5%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2022/23	453	370	82%	23	5%
2021/22	489	411	84%	11	2%
2020/21	303	232	77%	8	3%

**Stage 2** – we aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2022/2023, we closed **137** complaints at Stage 2, with **63** of these within timescale, or **47%**. **33 (24%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2022/23	137	65	47%	33	24%
2021/22	141	93	66%	35	25%
2020/21	67	46	69%	11	16%

Complaints with extensions agreed do not count as within timescale, these are reported as late responses.

## Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**After Escalation** – in 2022/2023, we closed **81** complaints after Escalation, with **46** of these within timescale, or **57%**. **23 (28%)** were closed after an extension was agree with the customer.

	No. of Complaints Closed	Within Timescale	%	No. with Extension	%
2022/23	81	46	57%	23	28%
2021/22	60	48	80%	8	13%
2020/21	37	23	62%	3	8%





## INDICATOR 6 – EXTENSIONS TO TIMESCALES

Part of the complaints handling procedure includes the option to seek an extension to the usual 5 or 20 day timescale, which should be agreed with the customer. This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage which were closed after an extension to the 5 or 20 day timeline was authorised.

### Stage 1

23 Extensions agreed

5% of total complaints

### Stage 2

33 extensions agreed

24% of total complaints

### Escalated complaints

23 extensions agreed

28% of total complaints



## INDICATOR 7 – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Our customers are automatically issued with a short complaints process satisfaction survey once their complaint has been closed. The survey asks for feedback about the complaints process, and gives an opportunity to send us suggestions for improvements. The survey results are reviewed by the Complaints Co-ordinators quarterly, and the feedback can be used to improve how we handle complaints.

We received 103 responses to our survey during the year, which is just over 15% of all complaints received. A low response rate makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of how all of our customers feel about the complaints process.

**58%** of customers who responded to the survey indicated that they found it easy to make a complaint

**53%** of customers confirmed they were told if the response was going to take longer than the set timescales

**52%** of customers advised that the response to their complaint was easy to understand.

From our review of the feedback provided through the surveys, we recognise that customers are often frustrated when an ongoing issue is not resolved through the complaints process.



## **INDICATOR 8 – LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS – REPORTING**

### **Who looks at our complaints figures and trends?**

Information about complaints figures and corrective action taken is reported regularly to senior managers and a quarterly report is submitted to the Strategic Management Team. This process ensures the appropriate level of scrutiny takes place.

Quarterly performance against the performance indicators is reported to the Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network (LACHN).

We are also required to report our complaints figures to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) by submitting an annual return.

### **How we report Complaints Performance and Trends to our Customers**

We publish the quarterly and annual reports on our website: [Complaints | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/complaints)



## INDICATOR 8 – LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS – IMPROVEMENTS

By dealing with complaints on a day-to-day basis, our Officers are able to make adjustments to processes when issues are raised. In general, no major policy or procedural changes were required in response to complaints, however, a number of minor changes or actions were taken in order to improve our services. Whilst these improvements may have been minor in the overall scale of activities within the Council, it is our hope that they have made significant changes to the quality of service received by our customers. Examples of some of these changes are shown below:

Customer wanted to make a complaint about the amount of time spent on a call trying to pay Council Tax for a business. The automated phone system was not recognising reference numbers and the system was not allowing payment. Partially Upheld – The script for the automated telephone system was reviewed and it was agreed that some clarification was required around Non-Domestic Rates (there is no Council Tax for businesses). This would assist customers to select the correct option when trying to make a payment. Contact was made with the provider of the system and it was updated and improved to assist customers in the future.

Customer complaint regarding the discolouration and moss growth on a Council Building in Dunoon. Upheld – this was a previously reported issue and despite moss retardant being used it had proved unsuccessful resulting in an unacceptable build-up of moss on the building. To resolve the immediate issue, an order was issued to the term contractor to undertake low pressure washing/cleaning to remove the mould/growth. This was completed within 3 weeks. The root cause of the issue is the type of masonry that was used when the building was refurbished as it requires regular low pressure washing to keep it free from discolouration which comes at a significant cost. Based on this now known issue, all appropriate teams within the Council have been advised not to use this type of masonry in any future projects.

Departmental Complaints Co-ordinators attend regular meetings where learning points from the SPSO are shared and discussed. The feedback and suggestions

from customer satisfaction surveys are also reviewed, and any potential improvement ideas are investigated and taken forward where appropriate.

## COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED BY THE SPSO

When a customer is not satisfied with our final response to a complaint, they can take it to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) and ask for the complaint to be investigated. The SPSO is the final arbiter for complaints about public services.

### Cases passed to SPSO during 2022/2023

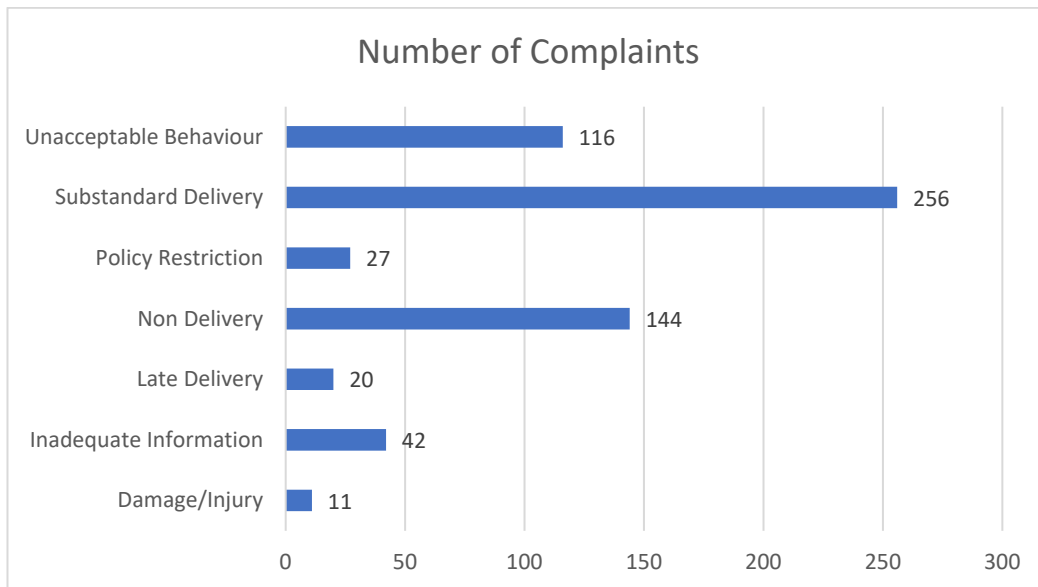
19 cases were received by the SPSO in relation to Argyll and Bute Council in 2022/2023. Of these, 4 were not progressed as 1 was mature (the complaint was out with the time period for raising the complaint) and 3 were enquiries. 15 cases were resolved early—when the SPSO receives a complaint they ask the Council to provide information in connection with the complaint, and from that information the investigating officer decides whether the complaint should be pursued further. If they are satisfied that the Council dealt with the complaint appropriately, it does not proceed to the full investigation stage. The main reasons provided by the SPSO for not proceeding to an investigation were “Good Complaint Handling” and “Insufficient benefit would be achieved”. No complaints were investigated by the SPSO.

The SPSO publishes reports about all the organisations it has involvement with. More information is available from [Statistics 2022-23 | SPSO](#)



## COMPLAINT THEMES

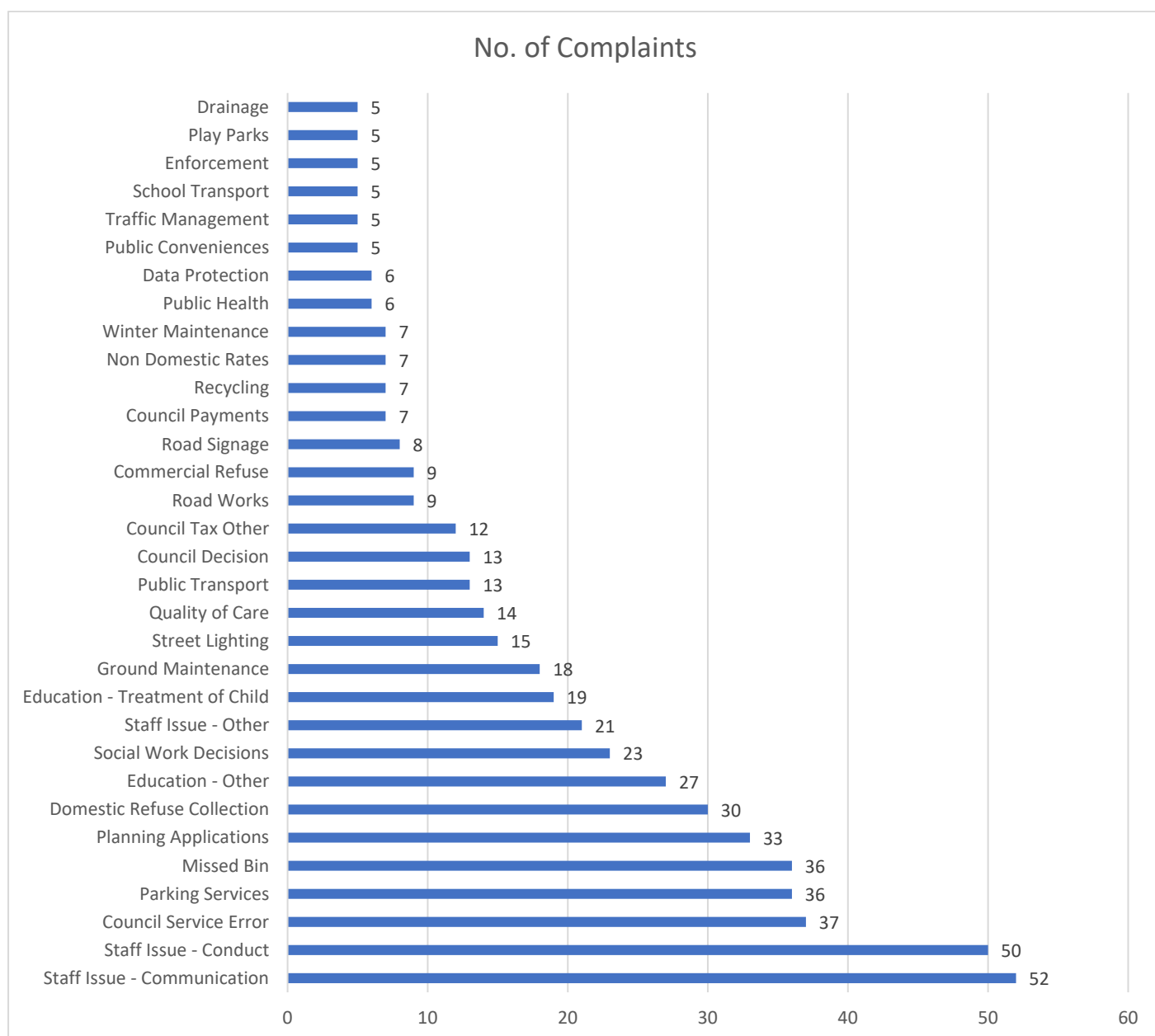
We record information about what type of complaints we receive, and have a standard set of categories that complaints generally fall into. The chart below shows how the complaints received have been classified during 2022-23.



*\*Note – the total here does not directly correspond with the total number of complaints, due to how escalated complaint categories are recorded*



We have also captured information about what we believe the main theme of each complaint to be. This information will be provided (along with other levels of analysis) to our Elected Members and Senior Management to allow them to take this into consideration when making policy and service decisions. The chart below shows the main issues we have received complaints about. It includes all complaints where we received 5 or more in connection with a particular issue.





## POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Thank you so much for your help it's been amazing you've been absolutely wonderful and I'm so glad to talk to someone in the council who is really brilliant at their job and good at what they are doing. Thank you so much indeed Argyll & Bute you've been great. Thank you.

The lady I spoke to today was very, very helpful very polite and gave me a lot of information and I think she was very wonderful. Thank you very much.

Quick note from me to say thanks for all your support and patience in getting the paperwork done! It was a long slog but we got there!

This is to congratulate the Council, and its partners, on the highly successful delivery of a key part of Lochgilphead's regeneration. The sheer quality and improvement already achieved is of a high order and will endure. The Front Green redevelopment also well reflects both a need to do so and significant consultation carried out by and on behalf of the Council

I would like thanks and recognition to be given to our legal services team. They are always superb in the support they give us but over the last couple of weeks they have gone above and beyond. The team have been excellent; they have worked long hours, often after hours and have given us their expertise, time and patience. Ordinarily their excellent work and support is taken for granted but I feel that the support we have had, over the past couple of weeks in particular has been exceptional and needs to be recognised. Without that support we would not have had the positive outcomes we have had and we are extremely grateful.



Here is just a small extract of the positive feedback that we have received this year. It is important to recognise that excellent services are being delivered, often in very challenging circumstances.

I've been dealing with another Council the earlier part of this week and it's been driving me up the wall so I just wanted to say thank you for having such an accessible service where you can ring up, it's so, so, so much better. Thanks

The young lady who dealt with me was very, very helpful. I'm 79 years of age I'm getting on a bit and she was very calm, very well-mannered and lovely. A big thank you. I don't know her name sorry but I'm a well satisfied lady. Thank you again

Thanks very much for this recent update and thank you very much for all your efforts and for your excellent communication throughout this process, it's been much appreciated.

Hello, I was absolutely amazed at how nice everybody is each time I ring up. I'm the one that turns out to be stupid and everyone treats me so nicely and the bin men were charming and everybody is so, nice. Thank you very, very much.

I just wanted to say that I was treated the way I'm always treated by Argyll & Bute very courteously and the woman was really nice and very helpful. Thank you.

Extremely efficient as I'm moving house so it was to notify Council Tax of this. All handled over the phone extremely efficient and yep on leaving Argyll & Bute you guys have been exceptionally efficient on everything we've had to deal with you about so hope new Council is at least half as good. Thank you



## CONTACT US

Thank you for looking at our annual complaints report for 2022-23. If you would like to know more about our complaints procedure, details can be found on our website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/argyll-and-bute-council/complaints>

Or you can contact us using any of the methods below.

Phone – 01546 605522

Text – 07860023933

Post – Argyll and Bute Council, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT

Email - [enquiries@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@argyll-bute.gov.uk)

Online - <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-council/how-contact-us>

