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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 2023 and 31 March 2024.



Argyll and Bute Council is committed to providing high quality services for residents, businesses and visitors in our area and an important part of this commitment is to ensure we have effective processes in place to resolve matters when things go wrong.

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 but we welcome and value complaints and feedback from our customers as it allows us to learn from the issues reported to us to improve the quality of the services we provide.

Some examples of those improvements made are included 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.



### 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'.

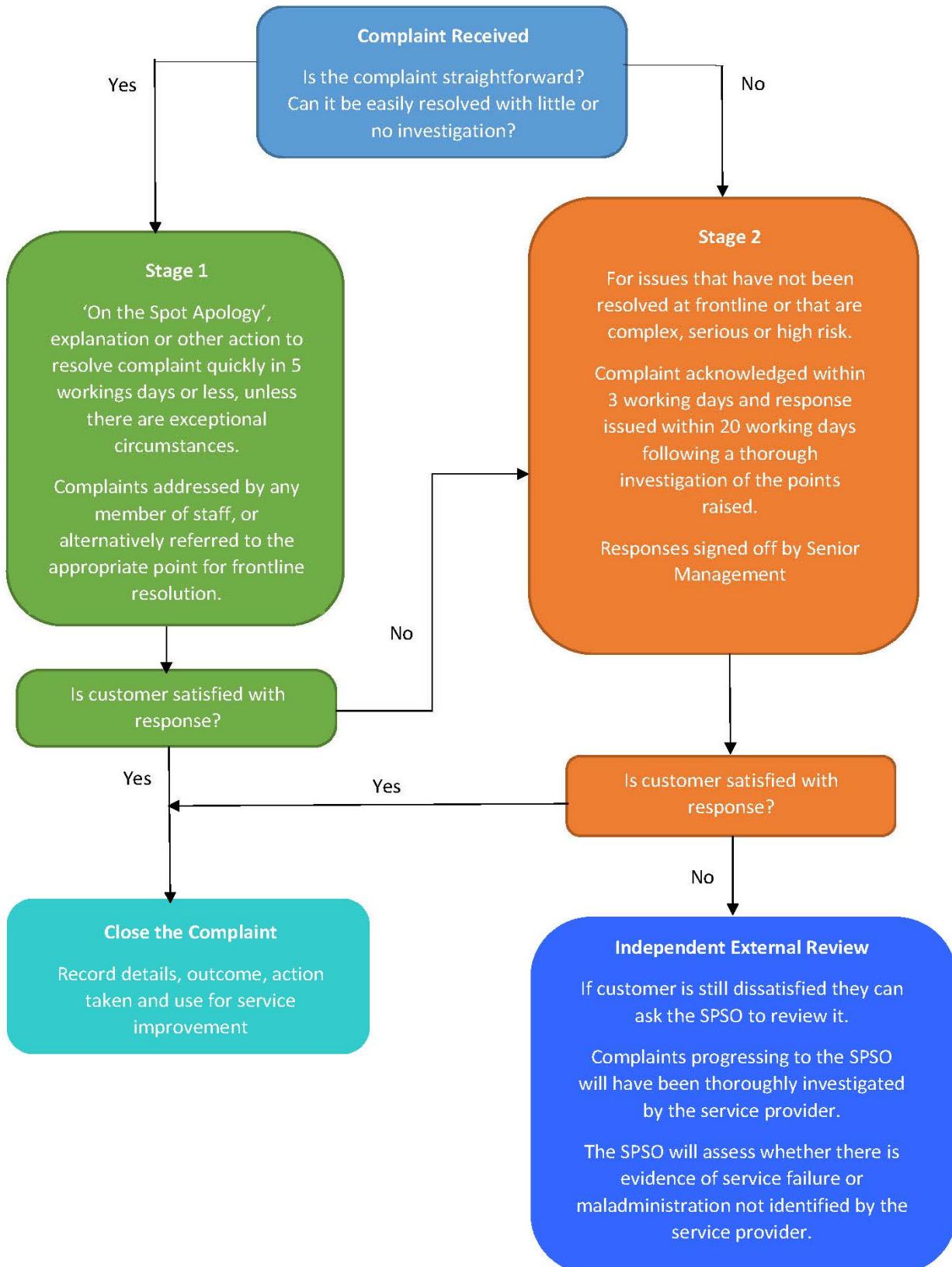
In most cases, a complaint will be made because the customer considers that the Council has:

- 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



This section details the total number of complaints handled by Argyll and Bute Council between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. 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”.

**781**

**86,220**



This means there were **9.1** complaints per **1,000 population**, or roughly **1** resident in **110** made a complaint about our services. A comparison of this indicator over the past 3 years is shown in the table below.


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).

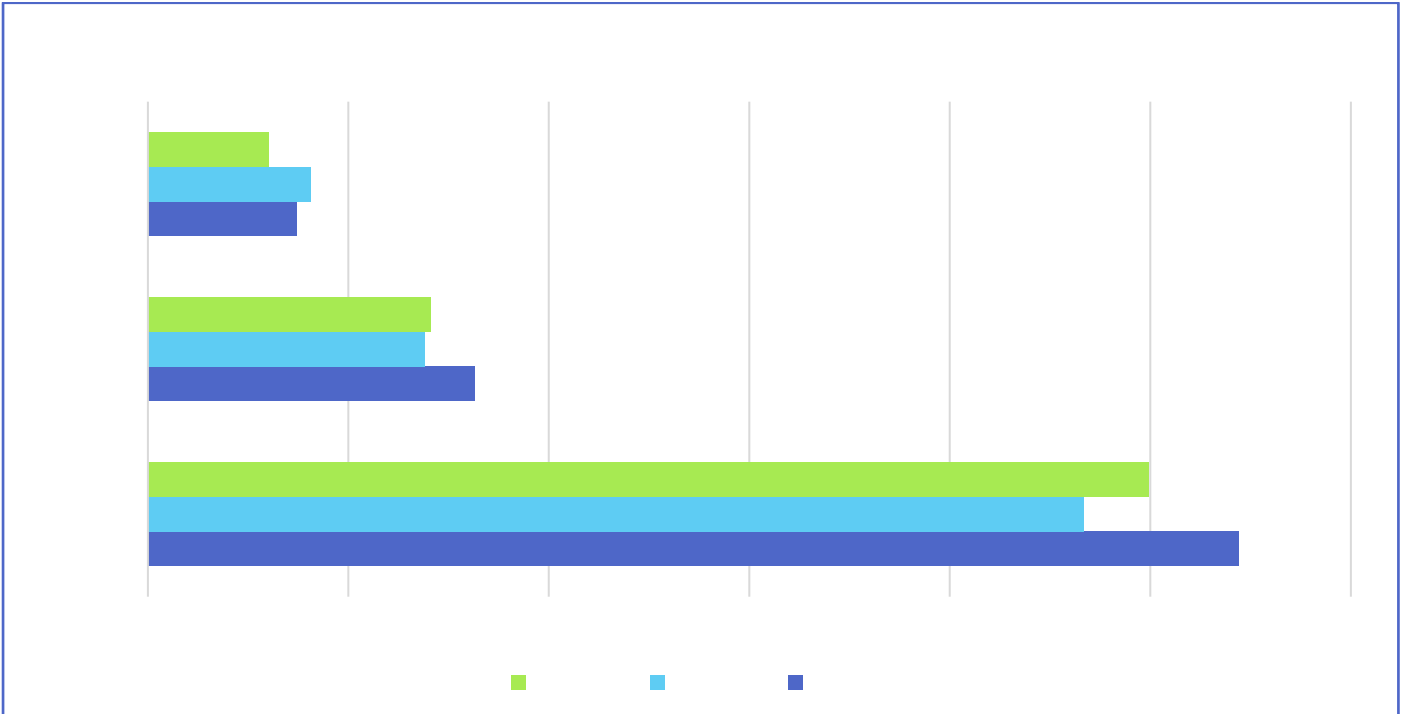
544 complaints were closed at Stage 1 – 70%

163 complaints were closed at Stage 2 – 21%

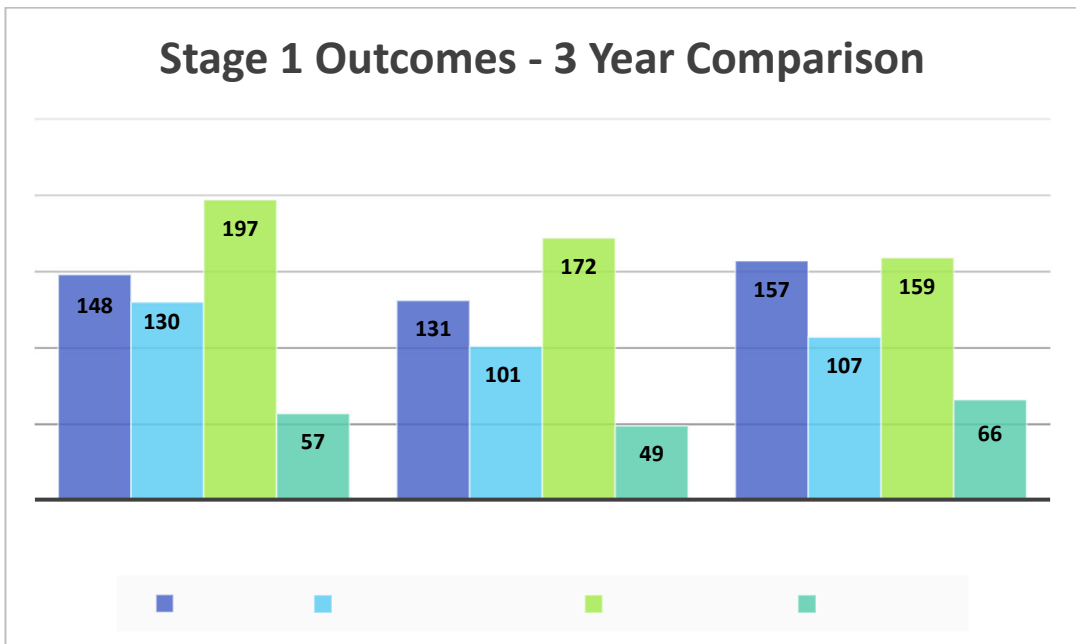
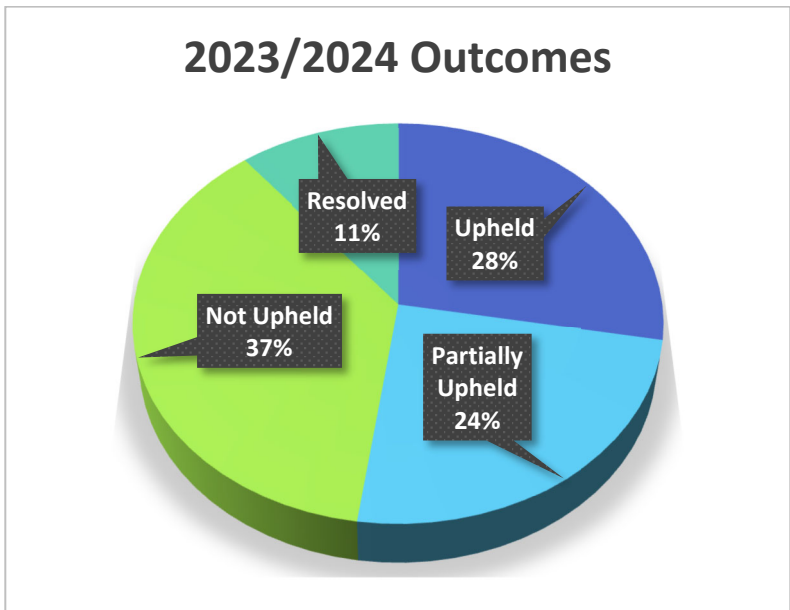
74 complaints were closed after escalation – 9%

12 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.

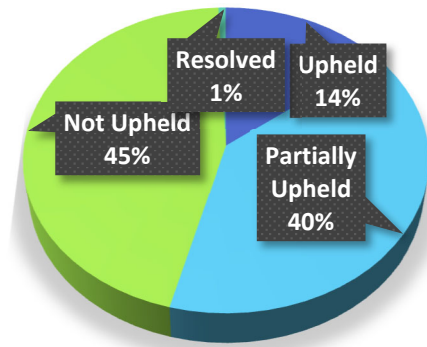


With every complaint, we contact the customer and explain what the outcome of their complaint was — Upheld, Not Upheld or Partially Upheld — and provide details about how this decision was made. The charts below provide a comparison of the outcomes for this year, and over the past 3 years. The “resolved” 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.

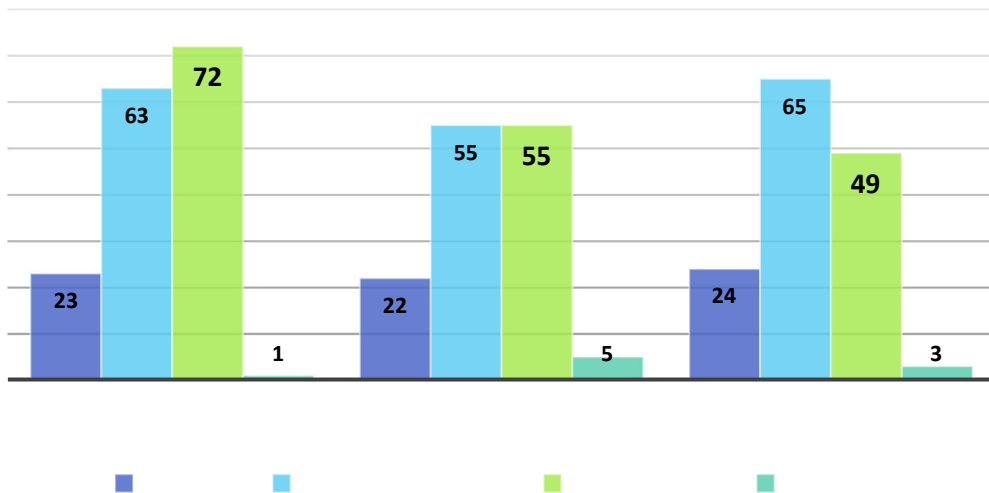




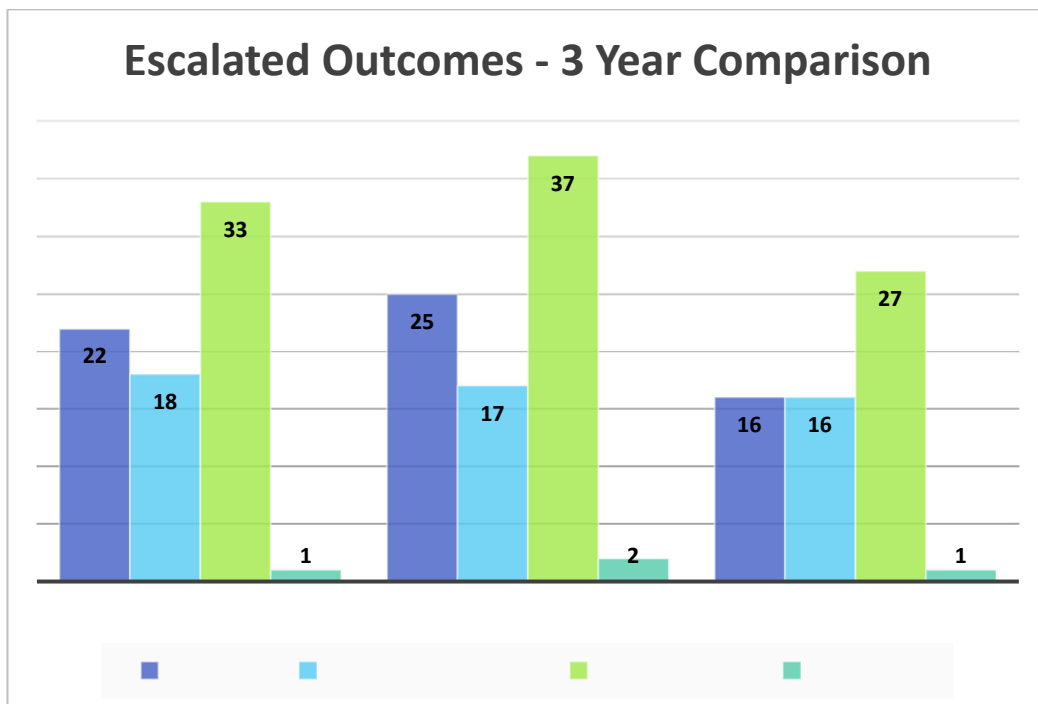
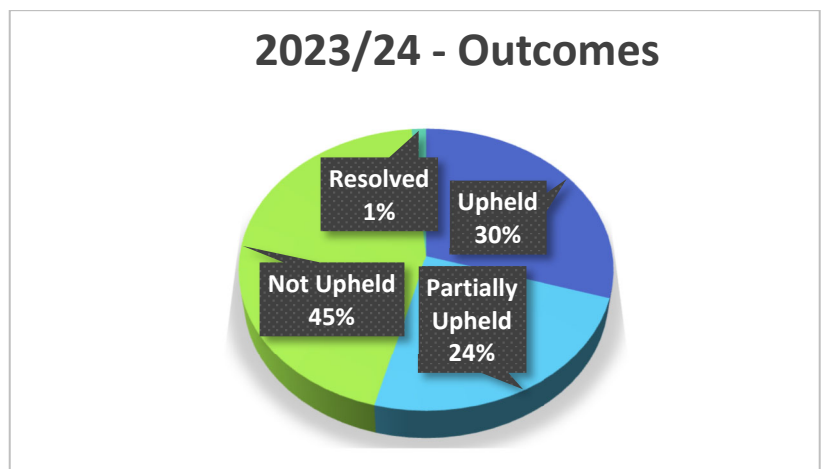
### 2023/2024 Outcomes



### Stage 2 Outcomes - 3 Year Comparison



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”.



**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2023/2024, we closed **532** complaints at Stage 1, with a total sum of **2,337 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.


**Stage 2** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2023/2024, we closed **159** complaints at Stage 2, with a total sum of **3,587 working days** used to close them. Our average time to close a Stage 2 complaint was **22.6 working days**.

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


## Indicator 4 – Average Times

**After Escalation** – in 2023/2024, we closed **74** escalated complaints after Escalation, with a total sum of **1,643 working days**. Our average time to close a complaint after Escalation was **22.2 working days**.

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






**Stage 1** – We aim to respond to and close all Stage 1 complaints within **5 working days**. In 2023/2024, we closed **532** complaints at Stage 1 with **442** of these within timescale, or **83%**. **37 (7%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.

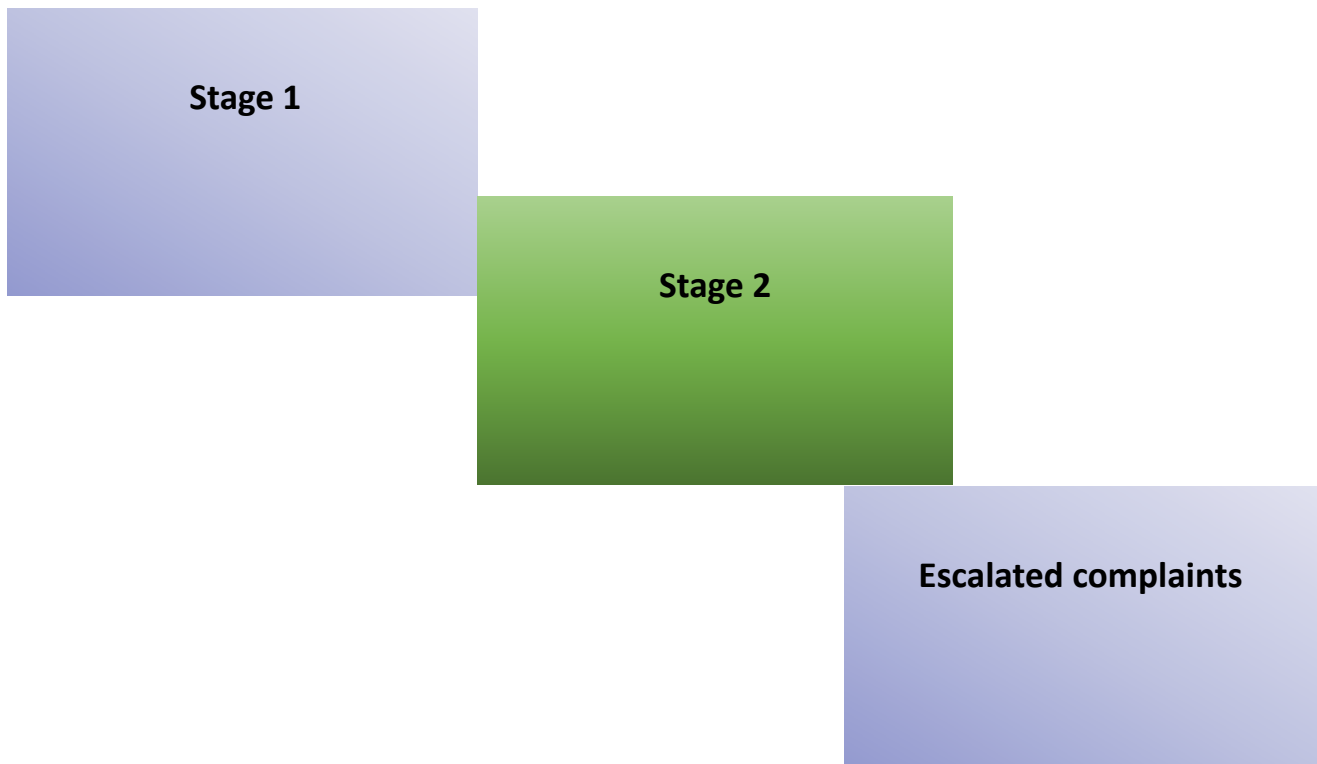

**Stage 2** – we aim to respond to and close all Stage 2 complaints within **20 working days**. In 2023/2024, we closed **159** complaints at Stage 2, with **100** of these within timescale, or **63%**. **38 (24%)** were closed after an extension was agreed with the customer.


## Indicator 5 – Performance Against Timescales

**After Escalation** – in 2023/2024, we closed **74** complaints after Escalation, with **44** of these within timescale, or **59%**. **12 (16%)** were closed after an extension was agree with the customer.




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.





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 86 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.

**68%** of customers indicated that they found it easy to make a complaint

**58%** of customers indicated they were told if the response was going to take longer than the set timescales

**64%** of customers indicated that information about the complaints procedure was easily accessible.

**58%** of customers indicated that they were given the opportunity to fully explain their complaint.

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.





## **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).

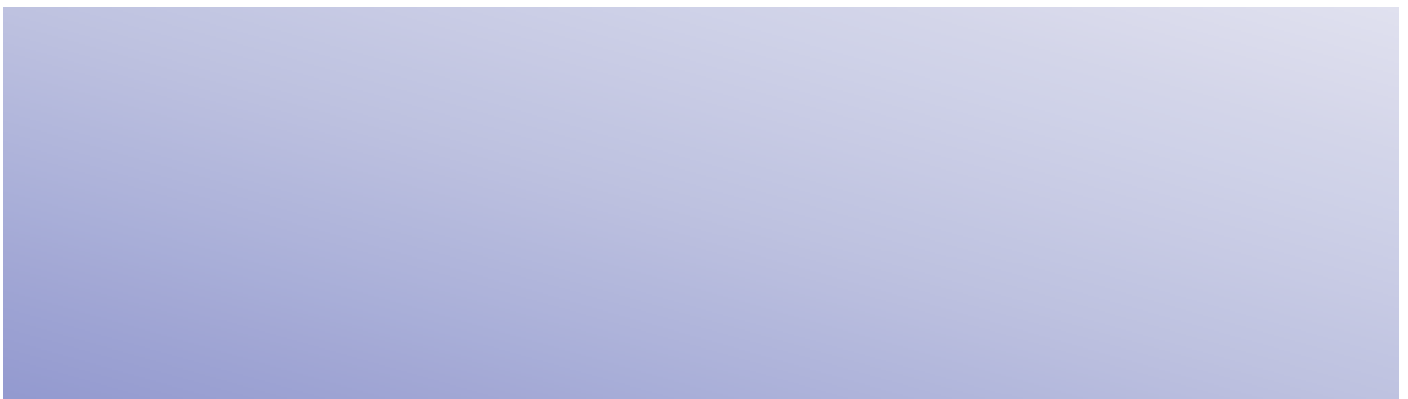
We are also required to report our complaints figures to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) by publishing our annual report.

## **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)



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:



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.

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 2023/2024

21 cases were received by the SPSO in relation to Argyll and Bute Council in 2023/2024.

**5** – Advice (not progressed) - 1 was mature (complaint was out with the time period for raising the complaint), 2 were premature (complainant contacted the SPSO before progressing through full complaints process) and 2 were enquiries.

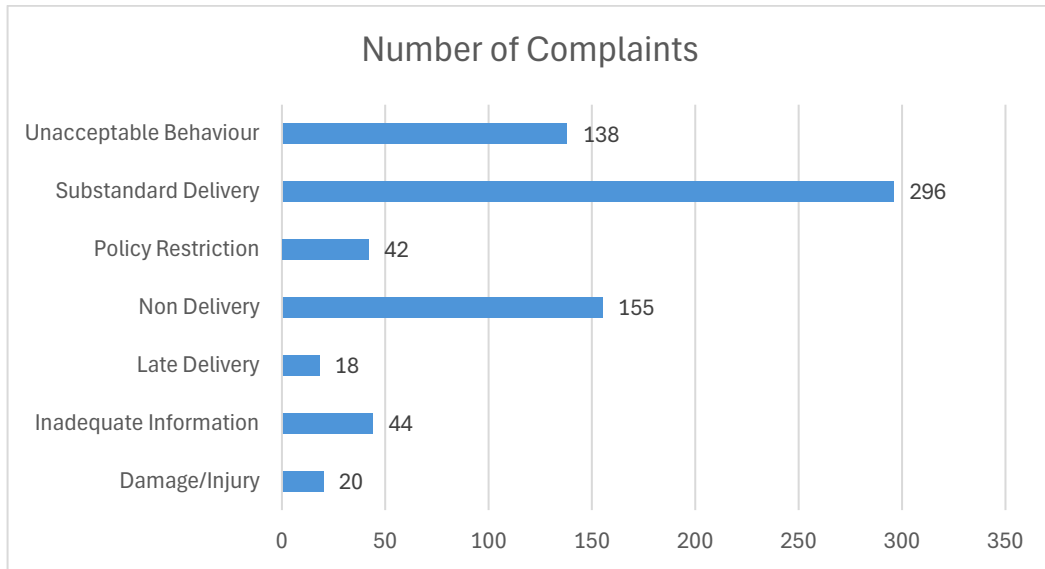
**15** - resolved early (not investigated) — the SPSO asks the Council to provide information in connection with the complaint, from that the investigating officer decides whether the complaint should be pursued further. The reasons provided for not proceeding to an investigation were “Good Complaint Handling” and “Insufficient benefit would be achieved”.

**1** – Investigation - complaint currently being investigated by the SPSO in which we are still awaiting a decision.

The SPSO publishes reports about all the organisations it has involvement with. More information is available from [Statistics 2023-24 | SPSO](#)





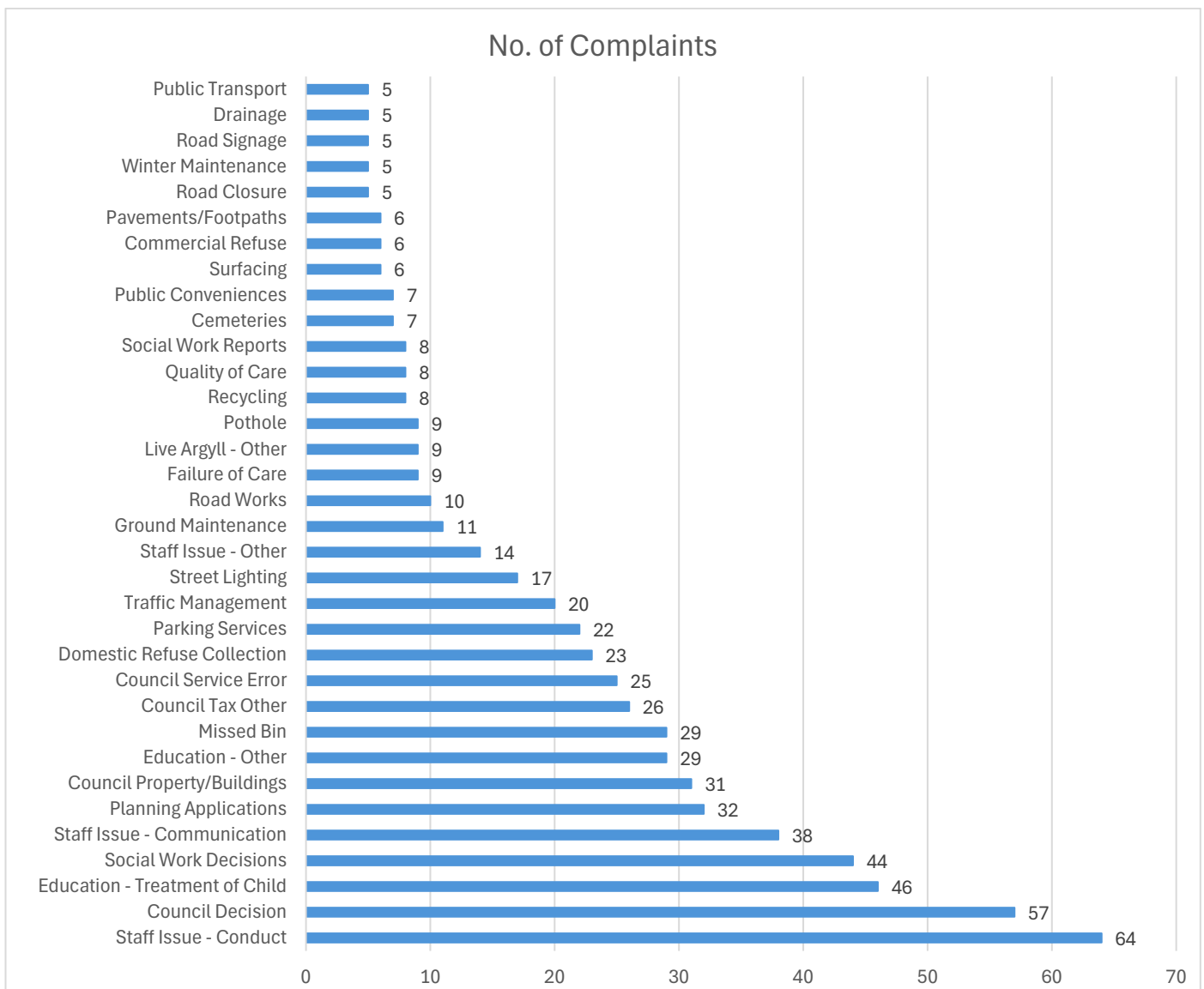


*\*Note – the total here does not directly correspond with the total number of complaints, due to how escalated complaint categories are recorded*





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.



Was a pleasure to deal with Argyll & Bute Council today, super professional, super-efficient got the job done. Brilliant, thank you very much

My call was quickly answered and was dealt with very professionally and very competently. Greatly appreciated being able to talk to someone to deal with this. Thank you very much

We have worked only once with Argyll & Bute Council but found the process easy, communication and feedback was great.

The girl that answered was very, very, good, she was very good at what she did, she was very cheerful you could even tell she was smiling in her voice. She was professional, she was brilliant, she needs a pay rise - give her one. Thank you very much

I dealt with her throughout the process from booking dates to the collection of our marriage certificate. I really cannot say enough about how friendly, professional and kind she was in all my dealings with her and she made our ceremony special and personal. I always thought that a civil ceremony might not be as special as a church service but the registrar proved me completely wrong and she will always have a special place in our hearts.



I was really happy because I was trying to find this information on your website and it's not your fault as my internet is painfully slow at the moment. The lady I spoke to was not only extremely helpful she offered to email it over to me so she's going to send me the information which is a great help. Thank you very much.

Your operator was very, very nice, very polite and resolved my query very quickly and no problem whatsoever. It was a very easy and short call and I was pleased with the outcome. Thank you very much indeed.

I would just like to say that any time I have phoned this number the staff have been excellent. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

I have a reading and writing disability, the person who answered my call was more than helpful with my enquiry and was also willing to help with other questions that I had. More than helpful, it was a pleasant experience. Thank you.

It was delightful to speak to a human being and the enquiry was sorted out within seconds or minutes. It was a delight to deal with the Argyll & Bute office

I was very emotional and upset when I phoned and found a very helpful young lady on the other end of the phone who calmed me down and could find ways of moving my problem forward and that someone will phone me back and I'll be able to discuss it. I found that very helpful. Thank you.



Thank you for looking at our annual complaints report for 2023-24. If you would like to know more about our complaints procedure, details can be found on our website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/my-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>

