

Complaints Handling Performance

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

Introduction

- The Council is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens, but we recognise that there are times when we get things wrong, and we fail to meet the expectations of our customers. The Council's Complaints Procedure provides customers with a mechanism to feedback their dissatisfaction. Complaints also provide helpful insight which can be used to improve service performance.
- This is a review of the Council's annual performance for complaints received and closed between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is based on performance indicator themes devised by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Council's complaints process

Customers can complaint to the Council through our Complaints Procedure which follows the SPSO's Local Authority Model Complaint Handling Procedure. This is based on a two-stage approach:

- Stage 1: Frontline response – Complaints which can be resolved as close to the frontline as possible, with a resolution target of 5 working days.
- Stage 2: Investigation – Complaints where the customer is not satisfied with the frontline response, or where the complaint is complex and requires further investigation (escalated complaints). Some complaints are also dealt with directly at the investigation stage if they are particularly complex. Stage 2 responses have a resolution target of 20 working days.

If a customer remains dissatisfied with the Council's Stage 2 response, they can refer their concerns and complaint to the SPSO. The SPSO will assess whether there is evidence of service failure, or maladministration not identified by the service provider.

Key figures

- The Council received 5,833 complaints during 2022-2023 – a decrease of 1,579 compared to the 7,412 complaints received in 2021-2022.
- Council services closed 5,746 complaints during 2022-2023 – a 6.5% decrease compared with the 6144 closed in 2021-2022.
- 77% of all closed complaints were concluded at Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution).
- 61% of Stage 1 complaints (Frontline Resolution) were responded to and resolved within 5 working days.
- 74% of Stage 2 complaints (Investigations) were responded to and resolved within 20 working days.
- 44% of escalated complaints from Stage 1 (Frontline Resolution) to Stage 2 (Investigation) were responded to within 20 working days.
- Council services resolved, upheld, or partially upheld 62% of all complaints closed during 2022-2023.
- 72 enquires were received from the SPSO during 2022-2023 concerning complaints against the Council.
- Most complaints received by the Council related to Waste, Parking and Housing.
- 1220 employees completed complaint handling e-learning training during 2022-2023.

Key headlines

- While the Council operates a decentralised approach to the handling of complaints, the Council's Corporate Complaints Management Group (CCMG) continues to meet and share best practice and identify opportunities to improve the management of complaints. With representatives from across the Council, the work of the Group helps to ensure a consistency of approach across the organisation.
- Complaints management formed part of the Council's internal audit programme for 2022. Several improvement actions were identified as part of the process, including better performance reporting and improved communications. All agreed actions have been met in full or are on target to meet specified completion dates.
- Given the multiple systems used by the Council to record complaints, one key workstream highlighted by the audit was the need for better complaints reporting processes to provide quality data to inform quarterly performance reporting. A revised reporting template has been developed and introduced which is helping to identify areas for improvement, and where learning has been used to drive service improvement.
- The revised Model Complaints Handling Procedure developed by the SPSO and implemented during 2021 is now embedded as a way of working, including regular use of the additional 'resolution' category.
- The Council continues to play an active role in the work of the Local Authority Complaint Handlers' Network which is committed to promoting good complaints handling and sharing best practice. The Council is currently the joint chair with the Scottish Borders Council.

Complaints closed: 5,746

Place

Q1: 934
Q2: 1009
Q3: 1444
Q4: 1262

Corporate Services

Q1: 163
Q2: 142
Q3: 148
Q4: 181

Children, Education & Justice Services

Q1: 80
Q2: 48
Q3: 113
Q4: 101

Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership

Q1: 38
Q2: 37
Q3: 24
Q4: 22

- During 2022–2023, 5,746 complaints were closed by the Council. The figures above set out the number of complaints which were closed by Council directorates for each quarter during 2022-2023. Overall, there was a 6.5% reduction in the total number of complaints closed during 2022 - 2023 (5,746) compared with 6,144 complaints closed in 2021-2022.
- 77% of complaints closed were frontline resolutions (Stage 1), 16% were investigations (Stage 2), and 7% were closed following escalation from Stage 1 to Stage 2.
- The Council received 5,833 complaints during 2022-2023. This is the equivalent to 11.1 received complaints per 1000 of population- a welcome decrease on the 14.1 per 1000 received during 2021-2022.

Complaints closed: 5,746

Place

Resolved: 969
Upheld: 1,349
Part upheld: 434

Not upheld: 1897

Corporate Services

Resolved: 42
Upheld: 299
Part upheld: 107

Not upheld: 186

Children, Education & Justice Services

Resolved: 103
Upheld: 47
Part upheld: 87

Not upheld: 93

Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership

Resolved: 36
Upheld: 28
Part upheld: 36

Not upheld: 21

- Following the implementation of the Council's revised Complaint Handling Procedure, a new complaint outcome of 'resolved' was introduced from April 2021. This means that it is now possible to close a complaint under the classification of 'resolved' without a need to decide whether the complaint should be upheld or not. This outcome can be used where it's possible to quickly agree on an action that will meet the customer's needs.
- The figures above show the number of complaints resolved, upheld, and partially upheld. For reference, complaints that were not upheld are also shown, but not included in the service totals.
- Overall, the Council resolved, upheld or partially upheld 3,537 complaints from a total of 5,746 complaints closed in 2022 – 2023 - 62% of the overall total. This is an overall decrease of 16% from the 78% of complaints which were resolved, upheld or partially upheld in 2021–2022. However, 64% is consistent with figures from previous years.

Performance against SPSO timescales

Directorate	2022-2023	2021-2022	Variance
Place	61%	30%	+31%
Corporate Services	64%	41%	+23%
Children, Education & Justice Services	54%	53%	+1%
Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership	41%	33%	+8%

- During 2022-2023, the Council answered 61% of Stage 1 complaints, 74% of Stage 2 complaints, and 44% of escalated complaints within time. Overall, the Council responded to 61% of all closed complaints within time during 2022-2023 - a significant increase when compared with 2021-2022 figures where only 31% of closed complaints were responded to within time. The current level of performance is closer to response figures from two years ago in 2020-2021 where an overall response rate of 64% was recorded.
- The table above sets out directorate performance in relation to the percentage of complaints which were closed (in full) at each stage of the complaints process. It also includes comparative figures from the previous reporting year. While there is still clearly room for better performance, there has been a welcome improvement across all Council directorates over the past year.
- In relation to complaints by the Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership, they are, by their very nature, usually complex and challenging which can have an impact on performance levels.

Performance against SPSO timescales

- While response times to Stage 2 complaints are comparatively high, with 74% answered within the timescales set out in the Council's Complaints Procedure, the performance level around escalated complaints is poor at 44%. It is not entirely clear why this is the case, but it is envisaged that improved recording and analysis will highlight issues and facilitate improved performance. Additional communications will also be issued to raise awareness around this issue.
- Another area of concern relates to the overall average times for providing full response to complaints at Stage 1. During 2022-2023, the average processing time for a Stage 1 response was 8.3 days. While it is clear from the figures presented in this report that many Stage 1 responses are resolved and responded to within 5 working days (61%), there is a significant minority which are taking longer to process which is having a detrimental impact on the average time for responding to a complaint. While 8.3 days is an improvement on the 9.6 days recorded in 2021-2022, communications will be issued to drive improvement. From analysis to date, it appears that services are not closing requests timeously.
- In contrast, Stage 2 average response times have shown considerable improvement. During 2022-2023, the average Stage 2 response time was 14.3 days – well within the 20-working day response time set out within Council's Complaints Procedure. This is an improvement on the 19.1 days recorded in 2021-2022.

Complaints and referrals to the SPSO

- Once customers have had their complaint handled through Stage 1 and 2 of the Council's complaints process, they can take their concerns to the SPSO if they are unhappy with the way in which their complaint has been handled. The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about Scottish public authorities.
- During 2022 - 2023, there were 71 enquiries made by the SPSO. These mostly concerned Housing, Parking, and Schools and Lifelong Learning. One Decision Report has been published which related to schools; however, this decision did not uphold the complaint.
- The table below highlights progress over time in relation to SPSO referrals and decisions for the Council.

	2022 - 2023	2021 - 2022	2020 - 2021	2019 - 2020	2018 - 2019
Enquiries	71	36	32	129	133
Decision Report	1	2	1	3	9

- The figures indicate a marked increase in enquiries received from SPSO in relation to Council services compared with the previous two years. This is likely attributed to the SPSO clearing their backlog of outstanding complaints which was accrued as a result of the pandemic. At the beginning of 2022-23, it was taking the SPSO 11 months to respond to customer complaints; that timescale has now been reduced to 4 months.

Learning from Complaints

- The Council is commitment to listening to customers and acting on their feedback to help improve our services. To build confidence and trust in this process, the Council publishes learning on a quarterly basis which is available on the Council's website at:
<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/contact-us/comments-complaints/4>
- Any learning which has a wider application across the Council is considered and taken forward through the Council's Strategic Complaints Group which provides a corporate overview of significant customer engagements received through the complaints process and statutory requests received under compliance legislation.

For more information regarding complaints please contact:

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